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LEONORA CASALONI.

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VOL. II.



# LEONORA CASALONI.

A Novel.

BY T. A. TROLLOPE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1868.

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO.,  
CITY ROAD.

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# LEONORA CASALONI.

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## BOOK III.

### FAMILY POLITICS.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### JUGGERNAUT WHEELS.

CESARE was left, however, but a very few minutes to meditate on the facts which he had just learned, and on the perfections and graces of his new relative, before the door of the room was again opened to give entrance to a very different personage.

Young Casaloni had frequently seen the ecclesiastical dignitary of his family at the time when it had first been settled that he was to be called to the honour and glory of becoming the hope and, one day, the head of the family. But this was now

several years ago, and he had been but a boy at the time. His recollections represented to him a very dignified, somewhat pompous and slow, but certainly handsome gentleman, in the habiliments of a church dignitary, of whom he had felt very terribly in awe. He had no remembrance of the old gentleman being otherwise than kind in his manner to him, and good-natured; but he recollected well how great and awful a thing it had seemed to him to be called on to speak with so grand a personage face to face, and the immense distance which he had felt to exist between the dignified churchman and himself. He had never, even in the earliest days of his promotion, stood so much in awe of the old Marchese. He was at all events only a layman, and therefore, in the imagination of the Roman boy, by no means so much a being of a different order and nature from himself as one of the mighty hierarchy of the Church. Gradually, as the irreverence of young manhood had succeeded to the dying reverence of boyhood, he had come to think of this often-heard-of but unseen dignitary of the family with much the same sentiments as youth is wont to regard that portion of the creation which it classes gregariously as "old fogies." And upon

the one sole occasion of a visit to Rome in later years, when he had seen Monsignore Casaloni, there had been nothing about the vision which had tended to modify his notions on the subject.

Nevertheless, he now felt a recurrence of the old feelings of awe. His own position with reference to the late dignified ecclesiastic was changed. The Lady Elena had let fall enough to show him, if he had before doubted it, that his future fate and fortune depended on the new Marchese. That it was, in fact, in a great measure independent of him, Cesare did not know. But, at all events, he knew enough of Rome and its ways to be quite aware that in his character of proscrip<sup>t</sup> and conspirator, as yet not formally pardoned, he was completely in the power of a cousin, the head of his family, who occupied the position in the Eternal City held by the late Monsignore (now Marchese) Casaloni. Then he felt that he was about to appear before the Marchese in the character of a culprit—of one who had to cry “peccavi,” and to ask forgiveness; and upon the whole he was disposed to anticipate that his interview with the Marchese would prove a very much less agreeable one than that with the Marchese’s wife. If only the whole of the matters to be

arranged between them could be settled through the medium of the Lady Elena, Cesare felt that he should be very sure that he would have nothing to fear, and that all would be smooth and pleasant. Had he been aware that the Marchese would have procured his unconditional and final pardon from the Government, had it not been that he had been counselled not to do so by the more far-seeing prudence of the Marchesa, his wife, the young man's views and notions of things, and of men and women—especially the latter—would have been somewhat unpleasantly modified.

The Marchese Ercole entered the room; and the first thing of which Cesare became sensible was of some very perceptible but not easily definable difference in the bearing and manner of the man, from that which he remembered in the whilom priest. He never had been struck before by his cousin's good-looking face and person. Now he could not help remarking that the figure which entered the room was that of a very handsome man. Then it was surprising how entirely the new Marchese had been able to put off, together with his cassock, that special priestly manner and tone which mark Rome's clergy as with a branding-

iron. The Marchese Ercole Casaloni might have been taken anywhere for a dignified and quiet-mannered country gentleman, with somewhat more of the air of a man of the world than mostly belongs to those members of any of the Italian aristocracies who do not permanently inhabit the great cities.

“Welcome to Rome, cousin Cesare!” he said, advancing and extending his hand to his young relative with a somewhat haughty gesture. “I am glad to see you here; . . . and you may imagine how great a trouble it has been to us all that you should not have been able to show yourself in the city before now. It has been a bad business, cousin,—a very bad business! And I trust that you are now willing to own as much yourself!”

“I am willing to admit, Signor Marchese, that I was guilty of doing a very foolish thing. I hope I shall be wiser in future. And I have to thank you very sincerely for having succeeded in preventing my folly from producing more permanent ill results.”

“I hope so! I hope so, cousin! I am sure I hope so very sincerely!” returned the elder man, pompously. “But you must not deceive yourself;

your pardon has not been yet definitively granted. That will depend on—on—ahem!—on ulterior circumstances. But I have reason to hope that, if all goes well, as I do not doubt it will, this may be put right before very long. In the meantime, you need fear no sort of inconvenience. You are doubtless aware, cousin, of the changes which the lamented death of my brother, the late Marchese, has made in—in my position?”

Cesare bowed in assent, and the ex-prelate eyed him from under his brows to see if he could spy any indication of the temper with which the young man regarded the changes he alluded to. But Cesare, having had the advantage of his previous interview, maintained an aspect of grave and respectful impassibility.

“Perhaps, however, you are not aware,” pursued the Marchese, with a very slight shade of irritation in his manner, “that the arrangements made by the family at the time you went to reside with my brother at Boscolungo have been very materially altered by the lamented circumstance of his death.”

Boscolungo, it should be mentioned, was the name of the Casaloni villa and property situated near the

foot of the Montamiata, a very remarkable and richly wooded mountain on the confines of Tuscany and the Pontifical State.

Cesare answered, with perfect truth, that he had never known with any accuracy what the arrangements made at that time had been, further than generally that he was to be the late Marchese's heir.

“Yes; it was determined, in the interests of the family, that you should be my brother's heir, and generally the future head of our house. But such an arrangement might be made in various ways. It might be revocable or non-revocable. And it seems to me, cousin, that the time has come when it is fitting that the true state of the matter, in all these respects, should be explained to you.”

The young man expressed his readiness to listen to any information which it might seem good to the Marchese to give him, and his thanks for the opportunity afforded him of receiving it.

“In the first place,” continued the Marchese, crossing one handsome leg over the other, and throwing himself back in his chair, “it is necessary that you should understand,—I should not be doing my duty if I did not explain to you,—that what-

ever dispositions of property may have been made, and however legally irrevocable under ordinary circumstances they may have been, all such dispositions would be set aside and nullified by the fact of the person in whose favour they had been made becoming an attainted rebel against the government of his Holiness the Pope."

"I had hoped, Signor Marchese——" began Cesare; but his relative interrupted him with a wave of a very handsome and richly jewelled hand.

"Permit me to lay the state of the case before you, Signor Cesare, and then we shall be the better able to discuss it. Any such heirship would be nullified under the circumstances I have spoken of, simply because all property whatever belonging to a rebel would be confiscated by the Government, and the recovery of it by any other member or members of the family would be a mere matter of grace and favour on the part of our Holy Father. Now, you are not,—thanks to the influence of your family,—you are not yet in the position of a convicted rebel. But neither are you free from the possibility and danger of finding yourself in that position. In other words, your future will depend for some certain period on your conduct being found to be all



that the Apostolic Government and—ahem!—and your family could wish it to be.”

The Marchese's last words seemed to Cesare to throw more light on the matter in hand than all he had said previously. He thought he began to understand the real state of the case. If he would show himself amenable to the wishes and plans of his family, whatever they might happen to be, the preferment to which he had been called by the family counsels, some six years or so ago, would still be his. If not, his recent act of insubordination would be made the means and the pretext of turning him adrift. What his “family”—*i.e.*, the Marchese—might wish him to do or to become he had not the smallest means of guessing. But he had a shrewd idea that there was a yet higher and more powerful authority than the Marchese. He recollected the last words of the fascinating Marchesa,—“Remember, I am there!”—and he felt a very comfortable assurance that the lot to which he might be destined by that highest “family” authority would not be such as he would find it impossible to submit to.

“As for the Government,” he said, therefore, in reply to the Marchese's last words, “I frankly

confess, Signor Marchese, that the indiscretion of which I have been guilty was a folly as well as a fault. I have no inclination to meddle with revolution any more, or to cast in my lot in any way with conspirators or revolutionists. *Tutt' altro!* The game is not an amusing one, when one is at it, I assure you. The Government will have no further complaint to make of me! And as for my family, Signor Marchese, I can only say that I hope no member of it will have any cause to be dissatisfied with me."

"Well said, young man!—very well said! Now, then, let me explain to you how matters stand, supposing no difficulty with the Government to interfere to alter them. When you were told that you were to be the future head of the family, it was naturally contemplated that my brother would have lived to the ordinary age of man;—that I should have by that time obtained the position to which I had so good a right to look forward;—that, in a word, I should have died a cardinal, and consequently a bachelor;—and that all the family property would have centred in you. Now, my late brother, with a view to the carrying out of these intentions, settled on you in a manner irrevocable,

under ordinary circumstances, certain parts—a very large portion—of the family estates. But there was another portion, large also, though not so large, which, held under a different tenure, descends according to a different rule of law, and which my brother therefore did not so settle on you. It would have descended to you had matters all remained as was contemplated; but it now descends to me. As things now stand, therefore, you (always supposing you to be liberated from all the consequences of your late indiscretion) are the owner of one portion—the largest—of the Casaloni estates, and I am the owner of the other. Have I made all this clear to you?”

“Perfectly so, Signor Marchese! I think I understand the whole of the circumstances completely; and I am very much obliged to you for explaining them to me,” said Cesare.

“Well! The position, you see, is not a desirable one. The property is divided. If it continues so, the family will no longer occupy that position which it has always hitherto held. Now, I will not disguise from you—I hope that we shall both find it for our own interest, and that of the family generally, to pull together, and I wish to be per-

fectly frank with you—I will not therefore disguise from you that it has been whispered to me that I might find the means of remedying the evil of this division of the family property by using my influence to prevent your obtaining your pardon, instead of doing all in my power to procure it. You understand? But that would not, I flatter myself, be in accordance with my usual mode of acting; nor would it become a Casaloni to accept willingly the disgrace of seeing one of the blood in such a position as you would in that case occupy.”

Cesare bowed low in reply to this, but said nothing. The Marchese, after a pause, proceeded.

“Is there any other mode to be found by which the misfortune of the division of the family property might be avoided? It will occur to you, Signor Cesare,—doubtless it has occurred to you while I have been speaking,—that this object might be very simply attained by my making you my heir, as my brother purposed making you his. But there is a difficulty in the way of my doing this.”

The Marchese paused, and seemed to expect that his hearer would speak. But Cesare did not know very well what to say, and so he remained silent, replying again only by a bow. The Marchese rose

from his chair, and walked once or twice up and down the room. Evidently he had come to the difficult part of his subject.

“There is a difficulty, I say, Signor Cesare,” he resumed, stopping in his walk, and standing opposite to the chair on which the young man remained sitting,—“an insuperable difficulty in the way of my acting in the manner I have mentioned. It is unnecessary to trouble you with any reference to circumstances which——that is——the simple fact is sufficient, and is all that concerns us now——I have a daughter, whom my recent marriage has of course recognised and legitimatized, and placed on the family tree in the position due to her—a position nearer to the trunk of it, of course, than your own. You perceive, cousin Cesare, that it is out of my power to prevent the division of the family property in the way that under other circumstances might have seemed the most natural.”

Again Cesare, feeling a difficulty in replying by words, answered only by a bow.

But this time such mute recognition of what had been told him did not satisfy the Marchese.

“You perceive, I say, cousin Cesare, that it is not

in my power to make you my heir, as I might have otherwise done."

"Clearly, Signor Marchese; and far be it from me to wish that you should do so under the circumstances," replied the younger man.

"Yes; it is easy to say that!" returned the Marchese, with some show of irritation; "and what would be the good of wishing? It is impossible. But is there no other means of attaining the end in view? That is the real question! Do you not perceive that the only way of preventing the cutting up of the property and the destruction of the family would be by a marriage between you and my daughter?"

The Marchese stopped, evidently expecting a ready and eager response from his hearer. Of course, to English notions, the fact that the gentleman had never seen the lady proposed to him for his wife would seem a very sufficient reason for such a proposal not being instantly jumped at. But any difficulty of that sort would have been quite out of place in the consideration of such a question between persons in the position of Ercole and Cesare Casaloni. It seemed clear enough that such a marriage was dictated by all the plainest

rules of family policy, and the Marchese was somewhat surprised therefore that his communication was responded to only by a start and a blank stare. It was not that it ever occurred to Cesare that there could be any reason for objecting to such a proposal on the score of the lady being wholly unknown to him. But the unexpectedness of it, joined to a flood of recollections which rushed through his brain at the moment, made him incapable of replying for a moment.

“Don’t you see it?” said the Marchese in the tone of a man who is irritated at the stupidity of one who fails to acquiesce in a self-evident proposition. “Don’t you see that it is the only course to pursue?”

“Certainly, Signor Marchese, that seems to be the only way of avoiding the division of the Casaloni property!” said Cesare, still hardly able to dismiss from his mind the memories which were besieging it sufficiently to bring his thoughts to bear effectively on the matter proposed for his consideration.

“And that division of the property, and consequent destruction of the family, *must* be avoided!” said the Marchese, in a very significantly impres-

sive manner. "But you forget, Signor Cesare," he continued, "that the mode I have suggested is *not* the *only* manner by which this end could be obtained. Remember what I said to you at the beginning of our conversation. Your condemnation as a revolutionist and a rebel would equally attain the same end; and that end, as you will admit, is one which, as I have said, *must* be attained. It comes to this, therefore, that we must choose one of these means or the other. Do you see it *now*?"

Cesare *did* see it now. He saw with very sufficient clearness that he had to choose between marrying his unseen cousin, or throwing up all the goods of fortune and position, and accepting the position of a penniless exile. The second alternative involved nothing *worse* than this. There was no danger that the *sbirri* would lay their hands on him before he could place himself beyond their reach. He had been clearly told that he was in no danger at Rome. Nor, though it might suit the purpose of the Marchese to cause his property to be forfeited as a rebel, could it seem desirable to him to encounter the scandal which would be caused by one of his blood, and bearing his name, being in the hands of the authorities as a criminal. No!



all that he had to do, if he chose to accept the second of the alternatives before him, was to get himself out of the Marchese's presence and house with any such evasive answer as he might, to leave Rome and the Pontifical territory at once, and return to the Maremma and to Leonora, trusting to his own faculties of hand or brain for the means of finding a subsistence.

It was all clear enough! He might do that, if he liked to do it. He could *not* hope to keep both Leonora and his position as heir to the Casaloni property. Yes, it was all clear enough! But——

It was not without a struggle that Cesare was able to make his choice, and signify it to his cousin;—not without a struggle that was a sharp one. But it was short. He knew the end of it in his inmost heart, as well at the beginning as at the end of it. What *could* he do? he said to himself. He could not starve. It would be wrong to Leonora to condemn her to such a lot. It was painful—very painful. The large, sad, clinging eyes of Leonora as she had looked into the very depths of his heart that evening when they sat on the beach, on the crag, looking over the moonlit bay,—those deep earnest eyes seemed still to be

gazing at him. He could see them still as he sat there, under the observation of his cousin, making ready to say the words which were to renounce and abandon her for ever. It was very—very painful; and Cesare, from the bottom of his heart, pitied himself very much.

And then the thought and the image of the Contessa Elena, as she had appeared to him during their interview that morning, recurred to him. It was her daughter that he was to marry. Surely that could not be a fate to be shunned! If the Contessa Elena knew all, what would she advise,—what would she tell him it was his duty to do? He could not doubt. Of course it was among such as she and her equals that his lot and his duty were cast. And there was no use in hesitating about the matter. Poor little, trusting, loving Leonora! Well, it could not be helped! He was not the first who had suffered what he was called upon to suffer, nor was she the first. It could not be helped. Possibly some shooting-excursion might one day carry him into that part of the world. But that was a mere fleeting thought—out of place at the present moment—and to be thrust into the background for possible future consideration. The

duty of the present moment had at all events to be done.

“Certainly, Signor Marchese. I see what you have been kind enough to point out; and of course I cannot but be highly flattered at the proposal you make to me. If I did not more immediately respond to it, you will understand that so sudden and altogether unexpected a proposition, however agreeable, takes a moment or two to realize it to one’s mind.”

“You see the great necessity of keeping the property together?”

“Unquestionably, Signor Marchese; most unquestionably. And the mode by which you suggest that this might be accomplished cannot, as you may imagine, but be most flattering and agreeable to me.”

“I hoped that you would find it so, cousin. It seems to me a plan by which all our interests may be combined and conciliated.”

“I can only hope that it may be equally acceptable to the Marchesa and to your daughter, Signor Marchese,” said Cesare, with a pleasant smile.

“As for the former, you may consider that the scheme has her warm approval. We have con-

sidered the matter together, and the Marchesa thinks, with me, that the marriage we are talking of is clearly the course which the interests of the family require. As for the young lady, you will not doubt, cousin Cesare, that a daughter of our house will sufficiently know her duty to accept with readiness the arrangements which her parents have thought good to make for her."

"No doubt, no doubt, Signor Marchese. Nevertheless, I should be glad to have an opportunity of ascertaining the young lady's own sentiments on the subject, if it might be permitted to me."

"Of course! of course! We must speak to the Marchesa about it. You will find, perhaps I should mention to you, that Stella,—that is my daughter's name,—has not as yet been as much formed as might be expected from her years and her position. But the fact is that—you will easily understand that the peculiar circumstances of her position hitherto have necessitated, or at least counselled, a life of great retirement; and,—but of course any little deficiencies of this sort may very readily be remedied. And, with the care of the Marchesa Elena, I doubt not that Stella will very shortly be fitted to assume the position assigned to her."

“Of that, Signore Marchese, I have not the slightest doubt,” returned Cesare with a low bow, which was intended rather as a homage to the Marchesa than as a courtesy to the present Marchese. “When may I hope,” he continued, “to have an opportunity of making acquaintance with my cousin Stella?”

“We must talk to the Marchesa about it. The sooner the better, I should say. But the fact is, that Stella is not now in Rome. She is at Boscolungo with her *gouvernante*. My notion is,” continued the Marchese, after a pause, “that the best thing would be for us all to go down and spend our Christmas at the villa, and get the marriage done there at as early a day as may be. It will be pleasanter than having a fuss here in Rome,—far pleasanter. And you and Stella can become acquainted with each other there better in a week than you would in three months here in the city. Don’t you think so, cousin Cesare?”

“Oh, to be sure; far better in every way!” assented Cesare, who felt a little as if he were being taken off his legs by the rapidity of the current in which he found himself, but who, nevertheless, agreed that it would be better to play the part

which was assigned to him down at the old villa than in Rome.

"I will speak to the Marchesa about it. We will see when we can leave Rome. When the marriage shall have been made, I have no doubt, cousin Cesare, that we shall be able to manage the affair of your definitive pardon without any further delay. Marriage is a great steadier of a man," continued the ex-prelate, with a smile, "and no doubt the Government will feel that there is little likelihood that *Signore Cesare dei Marchesi de Casaloni*, married to my daughter, should recommence his late extravagances!"

"No doubt, Signor Marchese, no doubt!" answered Cesare, with rather a pale and forced smile.

"*Dunque!* I think we understand each other satisfactorily; and I am heartily glad of it—very heartily glad of it, cousin Cesare," said the Marchese, rising and putting out his hand to his kinsman, who also rose from his chair. "We will see each other to-morrow, and settle about our journey. Meanwhile I will talk the matter over with the Marchesa, and you will let your good father know that we have come to a perfect understanding, and that you will probably be leaving Rome in a day or two.

And let us see you—stay! at what hour shall we say? Will you come and take your *colazione* with us at noon? Yes! Very good. At noon to-morrow, then. *A rivedirci, stimatissimo*, Signor Cesare. I assure you my heart is all the lighter for our morning's talk. *A rivedirci!*”

And so Cesare left the Palazzo Casaloni, feeling that everything had become changed for him since he entered it, that his whole future life lay before him an entirely different one from what he had that morning pictured it to himself, and that somehow or other all this was effected by some Juggernaut wheels of destiny, against the onward rolling of which he was utterly unable to contend. Such men as Cesare Casaloni are apt to feel that the rolling of the wheels is too strong for them. The “*mihi res, non me rebus*” was far above the ken of such philosophy as rules the lives of him and the like of him. Finding that the stream is strong, or even finding that there is a stream at all, is sufficient reason for such men to swim with it.

Nevertheless all was not made quite pleasant to him by swimming with the stream in which he found himself; and as he walked through the streets from the Palazzo Casaloni to his father's

house, he felt almost tempted to turn his face towards the Civita Vecchia gate instead, and to run away from all the greatness in store for him, for ever. Almost tempted! But this would have been a swimming against the stream, of which Cesare Casaloni was not capable.





## CHAPTER V.

### STELLA AND CESARE.

A VERY few days after the visit of Cesare to the Palazzo of his cousin, he found himself, swimming easily with the stream, but not without backward glances that were not altogether agreeable to him, domiciliated again once more at the villa under Montamiata. There was little or nothing changed about the place since he had quitted it one morning before daybreak to join the insurgents,—little or nothing of change that could be noted. And yet the familiar rooms and gardens did not seem to him to wear the same physiognomy which they used to do, and which he had grown to loathe because of the exceeding dulness of his existence among them. Partly it was that he was changed, and looked on all these things with changed eyes;

partly that in some subtle way the death of the master of a dwelling modifies what may be called the moral expression of it.

It was but a few months that he had been absent. But it seemed to Cesare that long years must have elapsed to give time for the events which had happened, and the changes that had been worked in himself. So true is it that time is measured by us wholly by the events that have occurred in it, and appears to us in the retrospect longer or shorter as there have been more or fewer of these ; just as a long colonnade divided into many spaces by an extended line of columns appears longer to the eye than an equal distance of objectless space.

It was now about a week from the day on which he had left the Maremma, and the memories connected with the time of his sojourn there, though they were far from being obliterated, seemed to have receded a wonderful distance into the past. Of course he had promised frequent letters. He was to write to Leonora the first day after his arrival in Rome. There would be so much to tell her. And of course she would always hear from him every two or three days. He had written no letter ! He had declared to himself from day to day that he

would write. But now he began to question whether it were best to do so, or to bury the past in absolute silence. If only Leonora would believe that he had died almost immediately on reaching Rome. But of course he knew that some tidings of him must reach her in some way. What would she think of him? He could not help it. It was his destiny—and his duty. What was the good of looking back, or thinking more about it? And yet he did look back, and think more about it; but not sufficiently to get any word written to Leonora.

In the meantime he had made the acquaintance of his cousin Stella.

It had taken the Marchese and his wife, with whom Cesare had travelled, three days to reach Boscolungo from Rome. And in the closeness of the intimacy resulting from these three days of travel, the Marchesa Elena had secured and completed the ascendancy which she had gained over her kinsman at their first interview. That interview had been planned and arranged between the Marchese and his wife. But nothing had ever dropped from either of them to indicate that the Marchese had in any way been cognisant of it.

And though no word that the Lady Elena had ever said had in the smallest degree implied that the Marchese had been ignorant of the step she took on that occasion, still Cesare chose to assume that it was so, and had a kind of feeling that a closer degree of understanding was produced between them by the existence of this common secret.

If only the young Marchesa Stella resembled her mother! That had been Cesare's thought and hope during the journey.

But Stella did not in any degree resemble her supposed mother. Not only she did not resemble the Lady Elena, but she was in almost every conceivable respect as much contrasted with her as it is possible for one very pretty female face and figure to be contrasted with another equally lovely. The Marchesa Elena was, as has been stated, dark,—dark brows, dark eyes, dark hair, and a bloodless white face. Stella was the exact reverse of all this. Her abundant hair was of the lightest and brightest chestnut, very much the colour that Titian loved to paint, and which is to the present day sure to meet with a greater number of Italian admirers than the loveliest raven's-wing locks that ever adorned a human head.

Then Stella had another beauty which formed a remarkable contrast to that of the Marchesa Elena, and which also is rarer in Italy. She had the brilliant pink and white complexion which is more frequently found to the north of the Alps. And this, too, is a beauty to which Italian men are very sensible. In figure, also, little Stella was as unlike her supposed mother as could be. She was slight and slender; and so was the Marchesa. But Stella was much less tall, and far less stately. Indeed there was nothing stately about her. How should there have been, it may be asked, when it is recollected what her life had been? But Leonora was by no means without stateliness. And little Stella would never have been stately, if she had lived in a court from her cradle upwards. She was built upon another plan. If the Marchesa Elena's movements were those of the deer, Stella's put one more in mind of the gambols of the mountain kid. She was small; delicate, without being fragile; and fairy-like in every part of her: little, round, rosy hands,—not long, slender, and tapering, like those of the Marchesa; feet after the same pattern; laughing blue eyes, and a little *bouton-de-rose* mouth, all curves, and pouting, and ripeness.

Such as she was, Cesare found it impossible to be disappointed at not finding her other than she was.

It was plain indeed, even to him, that she was what the Marchese had euphonically called very "unformed," *i.e.*, in plain English, uneducated. But, as was partly explained in a former chapter, with reference to the companionship of Cesare Casaloni and Sandro Vallardi, that circumstance was very far from producing the same results or any such incompatibilities as would have been produced by a similar cause among ourselves. Cesare was very much less educated than any English gentleman of his position would have been. And Stella needed much less education to make her what she really was, than an English girl, whose antecedents had been such as hers, would have needed. It is difficult to explain satisfactorily why this should be so. But those who have had an opportunity of observing the class of Italians to which Stella had hitherto belonged will have no difficulty in recognising the fact that, especially in the more favourable specimens of the class, the fact is to a very notable degree as it is above stated. It is probable that Stella could at that time both read and write. But

it is certain that Cesare, after several days' association with her, was not aware whether she possessed those accomplishments or not, and had most assuredly never asked himself the question. Indeed, the acquisition of those arts is, in the case of the majority of Italian women, in the southern half of the peninsula especially, very much analogous to the learning of Greek and Latin at school and college by an English country gentleman. If they *can* read and write, they abstain from exercising the power !

In the great majority of those acquirements which the Marchese probably had most prominently in his mind, when he spoke of the need his daughter had of being further "formed," she had already made great progress, and had done so much more quickly than most English girls would have done under the same circumstances. In the mysteries of walking, stepping, holding herself, sitting, rising, managing her draperies and skirts, and such like, she was already a very fair proficient. And these were the accomplishments in which her deficiency would have been noted by Cesare Casaloni.

It is difficult to an Englishman to imagine that the conversation of a girl such as Stella has been

described to be at this time could be in any degree tolerable to an educated gentleman attempting to converse with her as with a social equal. But the case in Italy is widely different from anything which his own experiences would enable him to imagine. There is no such wide difference between the educated and the uneducated classes in Italy as exists in England, especially as regards the women and the less educated portion of the upper classes among the men,—such as the smaller landowners, country gentlemen, and the like. But it must be admitted that this difference is produced not *wholly*, though mainly, by less perfected refinement of the upper classes, but in some degree by the less repelling coarseness of the lower. The two come nearer together by reason of the approach of either side to the debateable ground between them. Nor must it be forgotten, in estimating the circumstances of such a *rapprochement* as that between Cesare Casaloni and Stella, that Italians generally have not yet come to requiring that degree of mental equality between their wives and themselves which a cultivated Englishman of the latter half of the nineteenth century desires and expects to find. This equality between the sexes existed to a much less



degree among ourselves a hundred years ago, and less still two hundred years ago. No doubt it will exist to a much greater degree among the Italians of a generation or two hence. But at the present time it is the fact that the wives of many Italian men decidedly belonging to the cultured classes can make, and do make, no pretence whatever to cultivation.

In truth, therefore, there existed little or nothing to prevent Cesare Casaloni from finding his little cousin Stella a very charming girl, despite the recent date of her elevation to a social position the equal of his own.

He *did* find her a very charming girl; and though his first ideal of a youthful *fac-simile* of the elegant Marchesa was scattered to the winds in the first moment of his presentation to his cousin, he soon was able to consider himself a very fortunate man in respect of the wife appointed for him by destiny with its Juggernaut wheels. And in exact proportion with the growth of this conviction did the Maremma memories fade away into the seemingly far past, and attenuate themselves into the filmy consistency of a half-forgotten dream.

As for Stella herself,—here again it is necessary

for an English reader, and especially for one of Stella's sex, who would wish to appreciate rightly the feelings and character of an Italian girl in Stella's circumstances, to bear in mind the vast difference that the atmosphere of social ideas in the midst of which she has lived necessarily makes in her mode of viewing and feeling all things, and above all those things which have reference to the marriage tie. If an average English girl were to be introduced to a man, of whom it had been told her that that was the man destined to be her husband,—that such was the decree of fate, or of those who had the making of her fate in their hands, irrespective of any liking or disliking of hers upon the subject,—it is probable that the intimation so given her would have the effect of prejudicing her, not in favour of, but against the man so presented to her. There would be at the bottom of her heart a protest against the injury which she would feel to be done to her by such constraint,—a profound sentiment of the undueness and wrong of such dictation, which would of itself avail to produce the inclination and the desire to resist it.

The Italian girl comes to the consideration of the matter with a totally different preparation. No

English girl would dream of rebelling against the decree that she was to accompany her parents to live in town instead of in the country, however much she might wish the latter. She would accept her fate in this matter *as* fate. All her teaching, and all the ideas that she has assimilated from the social atmosphere around her in the course of her life, tend to this result. The Italian girl's mind is in the same condition, and from the same causes, in the other matter of which we are speaking. All that she has seen, all that she has ever heard, all that has gone to the formation of her ideas of duty, tend to persuade her that it is reasonable, right, and according to the proper and natural order of things that she should accept at her parents' hands, as her affianced husband, the man whom they may have seen fit to select as such. If their fate in this respect be not an obviously hard one, if the individual whom destiny presents to them as a husband be not such an one as a girl would certainly not have chosen for herself, she feels that she has every reason to rejoice, and to accept the gifts the gods provide her gladly and readily.

Now, when Stella, who had been duly given to understand that the cousin whom she would shortly

see at the villa was the person whom the choice of her parents and every consideration of family interest and social propriety designated as the most fitting man to become her husband,—when Stella, I say, was in due course presented to Cesare, she felt that she had every reason to be contented with her fate, and was well disposed to be favourably prejudiced in his favour. We know, indeed, from our former review of his qualifications and deficiencies as regards his position of “hero” in the present narrative, that he did possess many of the kind which little Stella was the most capable of appreciating, and the absence of which would have been most notable to her eyes; and further that the heroic qualities in which he was deficient were, on the contrary, of a class the want of which she was least likely to be able to detect or appreciate. To Stella, therefore, the man who was henceforth to make and to be her fate, who was to be all in all to her, came in due heroic guise, and she was ready and well pleased to fall down and worship accordingly.



## CHAPTER VI.

### “AMOR PACIFICO.”

CESARE had “made love” to Leonora. He had no special reason for thinking that his love would be acceptable to her. She was very remarkably of haughty mood, and one the fortress of whose maiden pride would yield only to long and well-directed wooing. And Cesare had begun and had accomplished the taking of this fortress without having premeditated on any such feat. And the gradual winning of that victory, and the slow acquired certitude that it was won, had been inexpressibly sweet. Now he had to “make love” to Stella; and it was by no means disagreeable to him to do so. But it was not the same thing. The upshot of the wooing in this case was too certainly foreknown and predestined! The hopes and fears and jealous cares were wanting.

Nor did the proprieties of the Marchesa's well-regulated house at Boscolungo quite permit the process of making love to Stella to be so delicious as that of winning Leonora, even under the chaperonage of the Gufone, had been. The free and wild Maremma ramblings could not be repeated under the new circumstances. The magnificently wooded slopes of Montamiata might have afforded, it is true, scenery as lovely, solitudes as romantic, and possibilities as inviting as the hills and valleys of the Maremma. But it would hardly have been consistent with the "convenances," and it certainly never came into the heads of "the lovers," to wander away into the forests, after the fashion that had been for many weeks, delicious weeks, a daily practice at Talamone. But then the Boscolungo love-making was a duty; and duty, as we are always told, is not to be expected to be as pleasant as play.

But yet the love-making went on very satisfactorily to all the parties concerned, including in that category the lady's father and mother. If distant wanderings in the Montamiata woods would not have seemed exactly the proper thing to the well-bred notions of the Marchesa Elena, there could be

no objection to strollings in the villa gardens, on the flagged and balustrade-adorned terraces, or between the cut cypress hedges, or among the orange-trees under the southern wall of the “stanzone.” And amid such safe and discreet surroundings the two cousins became really very fond of each other, though on very unequal terms, and with an exchange of hearts that could hardly have been said to be conducted on fair principles of barter. The heart that little Stella gave, with utter and entire trustfulness and completeness, was a new one ;—that which Cesare was giving her in exchange was, as we know, but second-hand. Nor was the deterioration in the value of the article arising from this circumstance merely a fanciful one. There were moments, during these strolls on the sunny southern terrace of the garden front of the villa, when it would appear to Stella as if Cesare were subject to sudden absence of mind, when her prattle fell unheeded on his ear, and when the eye of his mind was busy amid other scenes than those on which the eyes of his body rested. The Maremma memories, though far away now, and seeming to Cesare almost as if they belonged to some former state of his existence, were not dead ! And it was around the

crag on the promontory above Talamone, in the flower-enameled paths of the Maremma forests, that her lover's mind was straying, and with the forgotten tones of another voice that his ear was in fancy busy, at those moments. But of all this little Stella knew and guessed nothing.

The talk between the lovers was mainly of the future,—little plans for altering a walk here, or making a flower-bed there, consultations on the necessity of new curtains in one room, or new carpet in another, and such like;—rarely of the past. That was not a subject upon which either of them was anxious to speak. Not that Stella imagined that the story of her life in its outline was unknown to Cesare, not even that she had never spoken on the subject to him. But the topic was naturally not a pleasant one, or one to which she delighted to recur. Cesare on his side was ready enough to speak of his former life at the villa, and of the old Marchese, and of his former pedagogue the Rev. Michele Profondi, and of the dreadful dulness of those days. Nor had he any objection to speak to Stella of his conspirator experiences, except as they led him near to the brink of the Maremma time. He shunned approaching that in his talk, as a horse



resists passing the spot where he has been made to suffer.

Thus the days followed each other, and slipped away pleasantly enough at the villa, while the winter grew into spring. The marriage had been fixed to take place at the end of February. It was necessary that it should be either before the beginning or after the end of Lent. And there was no use, as the Marchese said, in needless delay. And it was settled that the ceremony should be performed at Boscolungo, in the last week of Carnival.

The Marchesa Elena had continued to behave to Cesare with the same gracious kindness of manner, which had so captivated him on the occasion of his first seeing her. She was not to him only, but to the Marchese her husband also, and to every one else around her, appearing in a more favourable light than she had ever done heretofore. She was a happier woman than she had ever been before; and happiness is a great sweetener of the disposition. The sore place in her heart had at length been healed. She had recovered the position which had been so bitter to her during many sad years of repining to have forfeited. Her long-cherished but

almost despairing hope that the day might come when her lost child should be restored to her, had at last been realised ; and the future of that child had been provided for in a manner to satisfy entirely her maternal solicitude and ambition. In a word, the Lady Elena was at last happy and in her right place, after having been for so many years very unhappy, and very painfully conscious of having been kept out of that place. And the result of the change was evident in her temper, in her bearing, in her step, in her eye, in her voice, in her smile.

As to the Marchese, it was curious and amusing to observe the unecclesiasticalness of him mingled with certain habits and traits of manner, which the old ecclesiastical life had burned into him too ineffaceably for any amount of volition to enable him to escape from them. But such habits and traits were mainly concerned with the outward man, and not with any special proclivities of mind. It would seem as if, in certain cases at all events, matter is less able to throw off the dominion of habit than mind. In his ways of thinking, and in the subject-matter of his thoughts, the ex-prelate seemed to resemble the ex-captain, whom the old necessity for rising at the call of the bugle only inclines to

damn the parade and sleep the longer. The mental machine, constrained so long, seemed to hasten to luxuriate in a freedom so long denied to it. But the late candidate for the purple could not use his legs with the freedom another man does. He could not avoid sitting straight in his chair with his two knees close together, in the fashion which ecclesiastical decorum and long years' habit of the cassock had taught him.

It may be, however, that these little peculiarities and discrepancies are to be explained, not so much by superior elasticity of mental over bodily habits, as by the supposition that the latter had, in fact, made the greater and more real part of the ecclesiastical training.

Sometimes the Lady Elena, whose long toleration of an ecclesiastic in the relationship in which Monsignore Casaloni had stood towards her, did not seem to have the effect of reconciling her to priestly manners in a husband, would make little attempts to reform small matters of the kind alluded to in a way that would not have been without suggestions of rather rich comedy to any looker-on, had there been such capable of appreciating them. But upon the whole the recently-married couple got on very

well together. It never occurred to the Marchese to doubt for an instant that he had done wisely in yielding to the representations and wishes of the Lady Elena. He, too, was well contented with his present life, and with the arrangements which had been made for the future. And the quiet life at the villa slipped away pleasantly enough, while the spring stole on, and the time fixed for the marriage approached, amid the tranquil love-making of the younger couple, and the new freedom and absence of constraint of the elder.

The weather during the last days of February was specially lovely, as is often the case in central and southern Italy. And the bright days had brought out people from their houses, and put it into the heads of sundry of the scattered neighbourhood around to find their way to Boscolungo, with greetings to the new proprietor and felicitations to the future one.

Among these came one day a small landowner from the neighbourhood of Arcidosso, Il Cavaliere Maurilli—not that his name signifies, for he has nothing to do with the events of this story—and with him the Rev. Michele Profondi, Cesare's old tutor. Maurilli was an old acquaintance of Cesare's,

though he now paid his respects to his neighbour the new Marchese for the first time. After the visitors had partaken of the *solazione* offered to them,—for the lack of hospitality, which seems to our notions to characterise the town habits of the Italians, does not extend to their mode of life when in the country,—the whole of the party strolled out into the garden, and the conversation turned on the specialities of the neighbouring district. Maurilli, who was a sportsman, spoke with enthusiasm of Montamiata, of its forests, the finest in this part of Italy, of the views from its heights, and the beauty of the scenery on its flanks. And the result was a proposal for an expedition to be made by the assembled party on the following day. There were to be horses for Stella; and the Marchese, Maurilli, Cesare, and Don Profondi were to walk. The Marchesa declined to join the party, declaring that she feared the fatigue would be too much for her, but that she should find plenty of occupation and amusement for her day alone at home.

At nine o'clock accordingly on the morrow the Marchese and Stella, with Cesare on foot at her bridle-rein, started from the villa. They were to

meet Maurilli and the priest on their way, and they were all to return together to the villa to a late dinner or supper at six in the evening.

A dressmaker from the neighbouring little town of San Salvatore had attended the Marchesa shortly after the party had started, and had remained with her, discussing matters connected with the approaching wedding, till it was nearly the hour for the mid-day meal at the villa. The lady took her *solazione* in solitude, and then went into the gardens to enjoy the delicious atmosphere and scents of the lovely spring day.

The gardens at Boscolungo are large, rather exceptionally so for an Italian villa, but they are wholly enclosed by walls of a considerable height. The villa itself, with its extensive out-buildings and dependencies, including a long "stanzone" for the reception of the orange trees in their huge earthenware pots during the winter, stretched along the entire northern side of the space. On the eastern side there was on the outside of the enclosing wall a thick wood, mainly of beech trees mixed with a sprinkling of stone pines. To the south and west, in which direction the ground sloped, the country was open, allowing the eye to range over the wall

of the garden to far-away hills in the Tuscan Maremma to the westward, and southward to the more distant and much higher peaks of Radicofani, and yet more distant summits far within the Roman territory. Above the fabric of the villa to the northward, and almost in the immediate vicinity, were visible the dark woods and steep sides of Montamiata.

This configuration and arrangement of the surrounding country made for the large Boscolungo gardens quite an exceptional and privileged climate. Sheltered from the quarters from which the cold winds came, and open and sloping towards the south, the great flag-paved terrace, which extended along the southern or garden front of the villa, was in point of climate some three or four weeks in advance of less-favoured spots. Though it was only the third week in February therefore, and though in colder Florence another month would need to elapse before the orange trees could be brought out from their winter quarters, this operation was already being performed at Boscolungo.

This annual work of bringing out the oranges and lemons to their stone stands in the gardens, and the taking of them back again when the first morn-

ing frosts of autumn begin to be nipping, is a job for which, in the case of large plants, some dozen men are required. Italian ways have not yet advanced so far as the employment for this purpose of any of the machinery which might so easily be applied to it. The simple plan pursued is to have a "*carro matto*," as it is termed, consisting of a very massive platform, on two enormously strong low wheels, which is wheeled into the *stanzone* to the low wall on which the huge pots stand ; then by sheer force of many arms to push and pull the plant, weighing with its massive pot something between ten and fifteen hundred weight, on to the platform, to wheel it to its destined position in the garden, and finally, by a similar application of strength, to land it on the stone pedestal prepared for it.

This annual operation was being performed in the Boscolungo gardens on the day on which the party to Montamiata took place. Nine men, in addition to the three gardeners regularly employed at the villa, had been at work all the morning, and more than half the plants were already on their stands in the garden. But at the time the Marchesa came out for her walk they had all gone



to their dinner, and to the two hours of repose allowed for it in accordance with the universal practice of all labourers in Italy.

The garden stretches away to the southward to a greater extent than its width from east to west ; to such an extent that the farthest part of it, hidden behind high edges of clipped box and beech, is quite out of sight of the house and of the upper part of the garden where the orange trees were being moved. The whole space, however, is walled in, as has been said, and the Marchese, therefore, in wandering to any part of the enclosure felt that she was still in the perfect privacy of her own dwelling. She had strolled down to this farther part of the garden, and was walking under the shelter of a high and thick hedge of beech, which had been cut into the semblance of a green wall. The path she was in was the last or most southern of several similar walks under other high clipped hedges, and was at the distance of only a very few yards from the south wall of the garden. She had only a white cambric handkerchief thrown over her head in a nun-like fashion, for the day at this the prime hour of it was as warm as summer.

Suddenly she was startled in her sauntering walk

by the thud of something heavy falling on the soft ground at the foot of the wall, and looking up, saw a man within a dozen feet of her. He had evidently jumped from the top of the wall to the ground.

Most women would have screamed; but the Marchesa Elena was not a woman of the screaming sort. Besides, she knew, or thought she knew, that assistance and protection, if needed, were close at hand and within call. They were not so, for the gardeners and their men had gone to their noontide rest.

Her first impression was that the intruder had come on some garden or poultry-yard robbing quest, and that he would be disconcerted and alarmed at finding himself thus face to face with one of the inmates of the villa. She was not allowed, however, to remain under this erroneous impression long.

Recovering himself with marvellous ease and agility from the result of his jump from a height of some ten or twelve feet, the man advanced a step or two towards the Marchesa, and then pausing, bowed lowly. He was, as the Marchesa then perceived, a young man of a very singular and by no means prepossessing appearance. But it is needless

to describe him, for the reader already knows him, and would at once recognise his old acquaintance, the Gufone.

"Upon my word, you are a very impudent fellow," said the Marchesa. "At mid-day! And how did you imagine that you were going to get back again, pray?"

"The same way I came, signora—by climbing the wall," replied the Gufone.

"Indeed! Well, if you will let me see you do it at once, I will be good-natured enough not to call the gardeners, and to allow you to escape. But I should advise you not to attempt the same thing a second time."

"It would be of no use to you to call the gardeners, signora—there are none in the gardens. They have all gone to dinner."

"What do you mean, fellow, by speaking to me in that way? And for what purpose have you intruded here?" asked the Lady Elena, not without something of a spasm of alarm at her heart, though she did not allow any symptom of it to appear in her manner.

"My purpose in coming here, signora, was expressly to speak to you—not in any offensive manner,

if it may be possible to avoid doing so. And I took care to ascertain that I should have the opportunity of doing so without danger of interruption."

"I don't know what you mean, nor who you are," said the lady, her transient sensation of personal alarm giving way to a vague undefined anxiety, resulting from the unusual and mysterious nature of the intrusion, the strange appearance of the intruder, and the tenor of his words.

"There is no reason why I should trouble you, Signora Marchesa, with any details as to the second point. It is of no consequence who I am—of no consequence, at least, to my present purpose. It may be that some day you will know who I am; but my present meaning and purpose, signora, is only to inform you of certain facts which it seems to me important that you should know."

"But does it seem to you that the mode you have chosen for giving me the information you speak of is calculated to induce me to pay any attention to anything you may have to say?" returned the Marchesa with a severe haughtiness of manner, which she could assume with much effect.

"I don't know. I cannot tell how that may be,

signora. But I know that what I wish to say to you concerns your interests, and that of others, and not my own in any way. If you are wise enough to listen to me, you may escape much sorrow and trouble. If you are not wise enough to do so, sorrow and trouble will fall upon you. May I speak?”

“I have no choice but to hear you; if it be true, as I suppose it is, that there is nobody within my call to prevent your speaking.”

“That is so, Signora Marchesa;—and it is true that I chose my time and place so as to secure a hearing. A marriage, it is said, has been arranged between your daughter the Marchesina Stella, and her cousin the Marchese Cesare Casaloni, and is shortly to take place.”

“Well, man, and what then?” said the Marchesa, haughtily and angrily, but yet anxious to hear what the man could have to say on such a subject.

“This, Signora Marchesa! If you have any regard for your daughter’s happiness or your own, or indeed if you wish to secure the objects this marriage is intended to secure, you will cause it to be broken off. The man calling himself the Marchese Cesare Casaloni is a base and false betrayer. He stands at the present moment engaged to be

married to another lady, and you may be very sure that——”

“Ah—h!” said the Marchesa, drawing herself up to her full height, and looking at the strange ill-shapen figure before her with eloquent scorn; “that is the nature of the communication you climbed over the wall to bring here, is it? We have heard of contrivances of this nature before. You may go back, signor, to the lady who has chosen you for her champion, and tell her that she is flying at game too much above her. And if you wish to preserve the character for prudence which you certainly have deserved in choosing a moment for coming here on such a mission when there was no man at hand to send you away in the manner you deserve, you will make the best of your way back over the wall.”

“Nevertheless, signora, may it not be well to pause till some inquiry can be made? Inquire of this Signor Cesare himself respecting the time between his escape from the Romagna and his appearance at Rome. And be assured that your neglect of what I am now saying to you will bring after it bitter sorrow and repentance.”

“Why, you silly fellow! The man who calls him-

self the Marchese Cesare Casaloni! Do you forget that you are speaking to a member of the same family? Can you suppose that the birth and parentage and history of the Marchese Cesare are not a great deal better known to us than they can be to anybody else?”

“It may be, signora, that they are better known to me, strange as that may seem. But of that I have nothing more to say. Were he ten times more certainly all that you suppose him to be, yet this marriage will not be what you suppose it to be. And I say again that if you have any regard for your daughter’s happiness you will pause.”

“Bah! I tell you, signor, that the trick is an old one—a very old, and a very contemptible one. Go, sir! A very likely protector and patron the lady you represent, has chosen, upon my word!”

“I represent no lady. No human being knows of my purpose of coming here.”

“Of course! Of course! *Che diavole!* Of course the jilted lady would not have the indelicacy of advancing her claims upon the gentleman in her own person. All that is quite understood.”

“The lady in question is far away,” returned the Gufone with a deep sigh, “and yesterday I had

no intention of doing what I have done to-day. I have done no good, I fear. But my sole purpose was to spare much sorrow and misery to you and to others; helped on, perhaps, to tell the whole truth by bitter anger and contempt for the false, worthless coward whose baseness and treachery will cause so much trouble. *A rivederla*, Signora Marchesa," said the Gufone, turning away towards the wall from which he had descended.

"*A rivederla!*" sneered the Marchesa. "No! I rather think not, signor."

"*Si*, Signora Marchesa. *A rivederla!*" repeated Nanni, speaking slowly and emphatically, and looking steadily at the Marchesa as he spoke. "*A rivederla fra poco!* And when that time comes, if you have been wise enough to profit by my warning, you will thank me for my visit. *Addio*, signora."

And so saying he ran along the foot of the wall for a few paces, thus gaining impetus for a spring which enabled him to catch with his hand the bough of a beech tree hanging over the wall from the other side. By the aid of this he swung himself up to the top of the wall with the utmost apparent ease, and in the next moment disappeared on the other side of it.



The Lady Elena was a little, a very little more disturbed by the incident which had happened to her, than she admitted to herself. Her real belief was in accordance with that she had expressed to the intruder — that this was some scheme to throw impediment in the way of a marriage which would destroy projects formed by some other parties ; or, perhaps, the mere revenge of the sufferer by some juvenile indiscretion of the Marchese Cesare. Who could say what people he might have been thrown among by the vicissitudes of his recent escapade, or during the period he was in hiding after the *denouement* of it? It was possible enough—nay, probable enough—that he might have more or less compromised himself with some girl of such rank and position as would be likely to make her the associate of conspirators and insurgents, or of proscribeds hiding from the agents of the government. But none of the social morality of the time, place, and people amid which the Marchesa had formed her notions of men and things, and duties and proprieties, was such as to lead her to feel that any such circumstances demanded a second thought from her, as bearing upon the marriage her daughter was to make. She did give a moment's thought to the

question whether or no she should mention what had occurred to her husband or to Cesare. And after a brief consideration of the matter, as she slowly walked back to the upper part of the garden, she decided that she would speak to neither of them on the subject. She would say nothing to her husband for fear he might possibly attach more importance to the thing than it merited—might, perhaps, be angry with the gardeners—or cause search to be made in the neighbourhood for the scaler of his garden wall;—might, in a word, make a fuss in some way which might be disagreeable. And as to Cesare, what good could arise from her speaking to him on such a subject? It might be disagreeable;—would be, certainly. And what good could it do? What business was it of hers? Least said was assuredly soonest mended in such matters.

The party returned from their excursion at the time they were expected, much delighted with their day and with the magnificent forests of Montamiata. Everything had been agreeable.

“Only that I really was frightened,” said Stella, “at that queer thing that happened as we were coming home. Cesare was leading my horse, mamma, down a very steep part of the path, when all of a

sudden he started as if he had seen a ghost, and turned as white as a sheet. And in the next moment we saw a man running away through the wood as fast as he could run. It *was* startling! But Cesare looked as if he must have had the evil eye on him. I hope the man had not the evil eye!”

“*Che! cara mia!* Don’t get anything into your head about the evil eye! It was very startling enough without any evil eye to catch a fellow’s face glaring at you from out of a thicket, as I saw that man’s,” said Cesare, who, in fact, had seen a man, as he said, evidently watching him and his companions, and had at once, to his infinite astonishment, recognised the Gufone.

Cesare, though perhaps truly enough a coward in the sense in which Nanni Scocco had applied the term to him, in speaking with the Marchesa, was not a man to be easily alarmed at physical danger; and certainly was not personally afraid of Il Gufone. But the unexpected strangeness of suddenly seeing Nanni, where it seemed to Cesare so little likely that he should be, the fact that the Gufone was evidently watching him, and all the memories and associations that the sight of those grotesque

and well-remembered features recalled, contributed to the shock that the sudden sight produced upon him.

No other of the party had seen either the face which Cesare had seen, or the flying figure which he and Stella had both seen and heard crashing through the underwood of the forest as it made off. The Cavaliere Maurilli had said, when they spoke of the circumstance, that there were charcoal-burners at work farther up the mountain, and that probably the approaching marriage of the young Marchese had been talked about, and one of these men had been curious to have a peep at the bride. And nothing more had been thought of the matter, save by Cesare, who could not entirely shake off a disagreeable feeling of misgiving at the strange fact that the Gufone should be there watching him; and by little Stella, who had been struck by the evident discomposure the occurrence had produced in Cesare.

Had Cesare in speaking of the circumstance said any one descriptive word of the appearance of the face he had seen, the Marchesa would have certainly recognised that face and head as belonging to her mysterious visitor in the garden, and might

then have been induced to mention the circumstance to Cesare, and to have communicated to him something of what had been said to her. But Cesare said no such word; and the Marchesa adhered to her determination of keeping to herself all mention of the intrusion upon her privacy.

Quickly, and without further incident of any sort, the time wore away till the last week in Carnival, when the marriage was to be celebrated. The Marchese and the Marchesa Elena were perfectly contented and happy. And Stella was not very far otherwise. Upon the whole, the fate assigned to her seemed to her a happy and an enviable one. Cesare seemed to her very nearly all that her uncultivated ignorance and young inexperience could wish him to be. Occasionally he would be subject to fits of absence and of depression; and at such moments little Stella would sometimes conceive the fear that the love that was between her and her cousin was not sufficient to make all his happiness. But such clouds lasted only as long as the passing cause which produced them. Upon the whole Cesare did his part very fairly well, considering the circumstances; and before the last day of the Carnival the marriage was solemnised.



## BOOK IV.

GUFONE HAS GREATNESS THRUST UPON HIM.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF SORROW.

It was with a sad and swelling heart that Leonora had stood on the jutting crag, on which Nanni Scocco had built the little summer-house, to watch the departure of Cesare and Il Gufone, on that morning, never to be forgotten by her, when they had started for Rome. The path by which they descended the hill from Vallardi's house to Talamone was commanded from this spot. And Leonora after the last words of adieu—not the real farewell that had been spoken with overflowing hearts on the henceforward sacred bench on the crag on the pre-

vious evening, but the formal and detestable adieu that had to be said before the rest at the moment of starting—Leonora, as soon as this had been got through, had hastened to her post of observation to watch her heart's master on his way, as long as straining eyes could follow him.

She had passed the rest of the morning on the same spot very miserable, and wondering at the misery and at the sense of utter loneliness and abandonment that weighed her down—wondering and speculating on it, till the time of the mid-day meal came. She knew that she would not be sought for or thought of, specially now that Il Gufone was away, till then. When Sandro was at home, Lucia thought of little else save of him; and assuredly Sandro would never think of inquiring for her. Besides, the habits of the scrambling and irregular life in the lone house on the promontory made it in no wise strange that she should ramble away and not be seen for hours.

But when the mealtime came, she thought that she must go down to the house. She would be called, and perhaps sought for at the bench, which was her favourite haunt, if she did not appear at mid-day; and she felt as if to be found at that

spot would have been equivalent to being detected in what she would not for the world that any human being should suspect. *Il Gufone*?—Yes; she knew that he knew that her heart had been given away, and to whom. No syllable had passed between them on the subject; but Leonora was quite sure that he knew. But then the *Gufone*, if to be considered as a human creature at all, was not as any other such. The love which Leonora felt for her life-long companion and teacher, and at the same time the immense distance which the ungainly ugliness of the poor *Gufo*, and the humbleness and matter-of-courseness of his devotion to her bred in her mind—love very much of the nature of that she might have felt for a faithful protecting dog, and distance of nature almost as great—contributed to make it tolerable to her that he should know that secret of her inmost heart, which she would not for the world have betrayed to any other.

She started from a reverie, when the sun standing right over a certain well-known point of the craggy outline of the Island of the Lily, told her that it was mid-day; and she hastened to run down to the house. There was a little clear rivulet of water at the bottom of the crag on which the



summer-house stood, making its way amid dry leaves to the edge of the precipice, just beneath the jutting crag, whence it leapt in a tiny jet to trickle across the low ground at the bottom to the sea. And Leonora paused a moment in her run, to kneel down by the side of it, and wash the traces that she knew the thoughts she had been indulging in must have left on her cheeks and in her eyes. It was very disagreeable to her on this occasion, this having to face her father and mother at the family meal; and she felt that it would be extremely difficult for her to behave as if no special event of immense importance to her life had happened.

The meal passed, and neither Sandro nor Lucia had taken any heed of her. They were engaged in talk of Sandro's approaching departure again; and he was giving certain directions respecting instructions to be given to the Gufone at his return. Leonora escaped as soon as she could, and stole back again to her seat, looking out over the far sea and land, like another Ariadne;—like another woman of the countless generations who have similarly looked out over land and sea!

They were very, very heavy to her, these long,

solitary, longing days, and the long, silent nights of thinking, thinking, thinking!

Then came the morning, that had been waited for during each one of the often-counted minutes that preceded it, as the bringer of consolation—the morning on which a letter from Cesare might reach her—the morning that had been fixed between them after minutest calculations of the possibilities!

The morning came! but it brought no letter! Leonora, who had gone down to Talamone an hour before the sauntering boy could have arrived with his nearly empty bag from Orbetello, would not believe the answer of the old woman entrusted with the administration of the little post-office, that there was no letter for Leonora Vallardi, or for either her father or her mother, among the few that had been in the bag. Very readily the old dame tossed down upon her little counter the whole of the morning arrivals, that she might satisfy herself of the fact. The doubt was rather an offence to old Signora Paoli; for it seemed to imply a misgiving as to her powers of reading; and that was rather a sore point with the Talamone representative of the postal administration.

“You might have taken my word for it! There’s

not one of those letters but what I can tell by the writing on the backs of them who they are for, once let me get my spectacles on, and get the light well on the words! And I reckon that's more than many a one as thinks themselves able to read can do! I told you there was no letter for you! Maybe there may be one to-morrow. Many's the time folks don't get their letters so soon as they expect them!"

And with this cold comfort, Leonora, with a heavy heart, was obliged to climb the hill again, and count the hours till the morrow's hope should become due.

But what was this to the weight of misery, the agony of suspense and fear and doubt, which the succeeding days were to bring upon her? And this again was nothing to yet deeper despair that was in store for her. For the idea of her lover's faithlessness had not yet crossed her mind. It had never presented itself to her imagination that such a thing was possible. That lowest, deepest misery was to come. For the present, as day after day brought only the same disappointment with new intensity, as her heart grew sick with hope deferred, her imagination pointed to all sorts of disastrous

causes, save the most disastrous, the most fatal of all. She fancied that Cesare must be dead, or at least too ill to be able to write; or perhaps in prison, and not allowed to write. Yes! that was the most probable—the *sbirri* had seized him when he got to Rome, and who knew what would become of him; perhaps he would never be heard of more! Why, why did he go away? Why go into the very jaws of his enemies? She felt certain that her last conjecture must be the true one! Of course he was not allowed to write! And then she would determine on going herself at all hazards to Rome! She should so be able to learn something at least. Possibly she might see him; possibly even be the means of releasing and saving him! She had heard stories of women who had found the means of liberating husbands, lovers, or fathers! In any case, she would be nearer to him, and would be doing something! To remain where she was in ignorance, suspense, and inactivity, seemed impossible to her.

But could she ever begin to put such a project into execution? If only the Gufone were at home! She would have confided all to him, and he would have helped her. When would he come home?

Leonora had never been in the habit of asking questions about the movements of the male portion of the family, and nobody ever told her anything on the subject. Lucia never seemed to know much about it. The going and coming of Sandro was regarded by those dependent on him very much as men think of the blowing of the wind,—as something very essential indeed to their comfort and well-being, but altogether incalculable, and depending on causes beyond their ken. It never occurred, therefore, to Leonora, that there could be any means of knowing when Il Gufone would return; and she could only wait, wait, wait, till he should appear.

One evening, however, at the supper-time, Sandro expressed to his wife surprise that the Gufone had not returned.

“I cannot think what can have become of the animal!” he said. “I gave him nothing to do in Rome that need have kept him there more than a few hours.”

“I hope no ill has come to the lad,” said Lucia. “*Dio ne guardi!* I should be very grieved if the poor Gufone came to trouble.”

“Bah! What ill should happen to him?”

rejoined her husband ; “ he is sure enough to come back like a bad penny. He will turn up before long, you may depend upon it. I think the creature is to be trusted, or——”

And here Signor Vallardi broke off, and apparently busied himself with the remainder of his thought in silence.

Leonora had thus learned that the Gufone might be expected from day to day ; and to his coming she looked forward for an exit from a state of suspense and doubt which was intolerable to her. She had ceased to hope for letters, so entirely had it grown to seem certain to her that Cesare was a prisoner in the hands of the *sbirri*. Once or twice she was on the point of speaking to Sandro on the subject. But it would have been a very unprecedented thing in that household to have done so ; and Leonora specially shrank with a reluctance which all her anxiety could not overcome from saying aught, especially to her father, which might have implied a confession that she felt any particular interest in their late guest or his fate.

Sandro, meanwhile, seemed to be delaying his departure for a day or two in the expectation that the Gufone might arrive ; and getting crosser and

crosser with each day of disappointment. At last he swore that he would start on the next day, whether the "red-haired devil" had returned or not. And on the next day, nothing having been seen of the Gufone, he left home accordingly, after leaving certain instructions with Signora Lucia, together with a message that he would wring the Gufone's ugly neck for him as sure as fate the next time he saw him.

Had he waited a little longer, that fate might have fallen on the Gufone sooner than it did; for on the second day after his departure Il Gufone made his appearance.



## CHAPTER II.

### IL DOTTORE ANASTASIO PROFONDI.

THE instructions Il Gufone had received from Sandro, when the latter had ordered him to proceed to Rome in company with the Marchese Cesare Casaloni, had been simply to deliver a letter at a certain address. And it is probable that the real motive of his mission was to acquire the certainty that Cesare had travelled directly to Rome, and had there forthwith placed himself in communication with his family. Other events, however, followed from this journey of Il Gufone which certainly Signor Vallardi had not foreseen, and which had been the means, as the Gufone reported to Signora Lucia, of retarding his return. It would not be correct to say that these events, to which it is now necessary to call the reader's attention, were caused



by the journey in question, because they would doubtless have been accomplished in some other fashion, if Nanni Scocco had not been sent to Rome by his patron. But, as it turned out, that journey was the occasion of their happening as they did, and the means of bringing them about more readily and more immediately than might otherwise have been the case.

Nanni punctually delivered the letter with which he had been entrusted at the address to which he had been told to carry it, and was proceeding thence to a certain *osteria* with which he was acquainted, for the purpose of "restoring" the inward man before setting out on his return to Talamone, when, on passing in front of a *café* on his way, his eye fell on a man whom he at once recognised as the individual who had accosted him in the street of Grosseto when he had gone thither in search for a doctor for his half-drowned rival. The person in question caught sight of the Gufone at the same instant, and, starting up, and hastily throwing on the little marble table at which he had been sitting the amount of his score, he joined Nanni, who, struck by the coincidence of thus falling in with this stranger a second time, had paused a minute in the street.

“*Buon giorno*, Signor Scocco. I told you we should meet again when I last had the pleasure of seeing you, though I did not imagine that it would have been in Rome. However, it is fortunate enough that I should have met you here, for it will save trouble to both of us. I have a little business to transact with you, Signor Scocco.”

“You showed me that evening at Grosseto, signore, that you know me, and certain things about me; but you will excuse me if I remark that I know nothing about you; and that—in short—that I am not fond of transacting business with strangers.”

“Ye—s, yes. I can understand that. It is a very proper caution in any person; and—a—specially so, perhaps, in a friend and follower of Signor Sandro Vallardi. Ye—s—yes. Quite so.”

“As for that,” replied the Gufone, prepared to be defiant, “if you mean——”

“No;—oh, no. By no means. I don’t mean anything of the sort. To make the matter plain to the slenderest capacity,—much more to such an intelligence as yours, Signor Scocco,—if you choose to walk away from me at this moment, instead of waiting to hear what I have to say to you, there is nothing on earth to prevent your doing so. I am

no *sbirro*, nor person set in authority over you, or any one else; nor have any such person at my beck and call. I invite you to—a,—to—a free conference,—perfectly so,—a—and one which, I should say, judging from the little I know of the universal principles of human nature—a—would by no means be disagreeable or unwelcome to you.”

“Judging from the little I know of your worship’s mode of talk,” said Nanni, after staring at the man for some seconds in silence, “I should say that a free conference with your worship would be rather a long affair. And I am somewhat in a hurry—and, to tell the truth—very hungry.”

“Very good! — quite apropos!” returned the stranger, without manifesting the slightest resentment at the Gufone’s rather impertinent satire; “talking and eating go excellently well together. I am quite ready for a mouthful of *merenda* myself. Allow me to be your entertainer;—not, observe, taking you to any place of my selection, where you might imagine that I was leading you into an ambuscade of *sbirri*, *giandarmi*, and agents of the police, or where I might have the means of setting poisoned or drugged viands before you, after the fashion which—as is well known to all strangers in

the Eternal City—has been an ordinary practice there since the days of Signor Cesare Borgia and his holy father Pope Alexander of blessed memory ;—not so, but at any tavern or eating-house of your own selection. Do you approve of my suggestion ?”

“And *you* find talking and eating go well together, do you ?” returned Nanni, after another prolonged stare at the stranger.

“To be sure I do, my young friend. It is the especial prerogative of humanity. Discourse I hold to be the best sauce for food ; and so——”

“But, *scusi* signor,” interrupted Nanni, speaking quickly enough this time, “do you like dining off a tureen-full of sauce with two or three little bits of meat floating about in it ; or, if not, don’t you find that it takes an enormous quantity of food to go to so much sauce ?”

“Very well observed, Signor Scocco ; very well. But in the little symposium which I have had the honour of proposing to you, the proportions of sauce to the meat, and of meat to the sauce, shall be at your own discretion. Say, is it a bargain ? Will you accept my offer ? You know already that I have the pleasure of being acquainted with your respected grandfather.”

“ Well, signor, I will not refuse to talk with you since you wish it; not so much, to tell you the truth, because of your acquaintance with my respected grandfather, as because, seeing that I am of full age, my respected grandfather has no longer any authority or power over me. Where shall we go? I am not afraid that anybody should think it worth their while to poison me.”

“ Well, I don’t know about that,” replied the stranger, in the tone of one who protests against another’s too lowly estimate of himself; “ I don’t see that at all. However, here is a *trattoria*, which will serve our turn as well as another. The ‘Immaculate Conception!’ A very good sign. I won’t answer for it that the epithet will apply to the table-cloth, but the food will not be poisoned. No, no! Will you come in? Poison at the ‘Immaculate Conception!’ No, no!”

“ I never should have thought of such a thing, signor, if you had not,” said Nanni, following his entertainer into the *trattoria*, and half beginning to think that the friend of his respected grandfather was a little touched in the head.

However this might be, it by no means incapacitated him from knowing how to order a repast

which appeared a very royal banquet to the hungry Gufone. First, anchovies and bread and butter; then a *frittata* composed of morsels of liver, and brains, and bits of bread, and fragments of artichoke, fried in a coating of batter, and served with lemons cut into four quarters; then an *umido*, consisting of a breast of very young lamb, cut into fragments and stewed in a rich gravy flavoured with garlic; and lastly, an *arrosto* of little birds, supposed by courtesy to be thrushes, but which were probably recognisable during life as less aristocratic "songsters of the grove." A flask of Orvieto added to all this, and a dessert of Parmesan cheese, apples, and little biscuits, to crown it, made a feast which might well have entitled the giver to garnish it with as much of the sauce the stranger had referred to as he might see fit.

Nanni's entertainer was, however, far more discreet in this respect than Nanni had given him credit for—at all events, until they had reached the dessert. During the repast he seemed only desirous that his guest should enjoy himself, and make an excellent, good dinner; and it is not to be denied that the Gufone's respect for the acquaintance of his grandfather was very sensibly increased by the

time he had crunched and sucked the flavour from the last of the bones of the last of the little birds.

“And now, Signor Scocco,” said the stranger, when that point had been reached, pouring the last of the Orvieto into Nanni’s glass as he spoke, “we will proceed, if it is not disagreeable to you, to our little bit of business. You will doubtless be glad to hear that your grandfather, the sacristan at Arcidosso, is alive and well.”

“*Si, signor!*” answered Nanni; “as I remarked to you just now, my grandfather has no authority over me now; and—under those circumstances—I am very glad to hear that he is alive and well.”

“Ye—s; yes, yes. You ran away from him because you were not content with his treatment of you?”

“Yes; I ran away because I thought I should like something else better than living with him at Arcidosso. I don’t want to make any complaint against the old man. He had me taught, and he gave me bread enough, and now and then a bit of *salame*. But somehow or other I was not very fond of him, or of Arcidosso, or of the old house, or the life there. He was rather a cantankerous old gentle-

man sometimes; and then he had a way of not keeping his hands and arms and legs to himself, and they were plaguy long ones, like mine, you see."

"Ye—s, yes; I see. There was, speaking generally, an undue preponderance of kicks over halfpence under the old sacristan's roof. Ye—s, yes. Do you know, Signor Scocco, how it came to pass that you lived with old Simone Scocco, the sacristan of San Zenobio, at Arcidosso?"

"Because he was my grandfather, I suppose," answered Nanni, staring at his host, who sat on the opposite side of the little table, looking at him with his head on one side, with the air of a curious and reflective jackdaw.

"Very true—very true indeed," said he, speaking as if he were quite struck with the justice of his guest's remark. "But do you know," he added, shutting one eye and putting his head still more on one side, "do you know how he came to be your grandfather?"

"Why, by being my father's father, I suppose," said the Gufone, still staring at him.

"Ah!—Hah!—Humph! Because," remarked the stranger meditatively, "there's two ways of



being a man's grandfather, you know, Signor Scocco."

"So there are—to be sure," said Nanni; "I never thought of that before," said Nanni, thoughtfully.

"Well, then, which way was old Simone, the sacristan, your grandfather?" asked the stranger.

"Well, I don't know—I never heard anything about it," replied Nanni, scratching his great red head of shock hair. "He always was grandfather as long as I can recollect. I never thought of asking anybody how he came to be grandfather. It seems strange, don't it?"

"Perhaps it may seem to you stranger still, Signor Scocco, that I can tell you, if you would like to know, how old Simone came to be your grandfather. Shall I tell you?" said the stranger, amusing himself while speaking with tossing and catching again an apple which he had taken from the dish on the table.

"Just as you like, signor. After eating the dinner you have given me, I am bound to hear all you choose to tell me. But for my own part, I don't care this bit of cheese-paring about it," returned the Gufone, with a very philosophical—or

very unphilosophical, as the reader may think it—conviction of the worthlessness of genealogical facts.

“I think I will trust to your changing your mind upon that subject when I shall have told you what I have to tell. And now, signor, I will beg your best attention to what I have to say,” returned the man, putting the apple he had been playing with back into the dish, and speaking with more of business-like earnestness than he had done in the previous part of the conversation. “Signor Simone Scocco, the sacristan of San Zenobio, at Arcidosso, was the father, not of your father, but of your mother ; and thus——”

“*Scusi*, signor,” interrupted Nanni, “but if that were so, how can it be that my name should be Nanni Scocco, as it is, although the world in general has seen fit to call me mostly *Il Gufone* instead of it? I thought that people were called by the name of their father, and not by that of their mother.”

The stranger smiled, and nodded his head very approvingly three or four times before he said, in reply to this observation—

“That is by no means the remark of a *Gufone*, Signor Scocco. It is the observation of a much

cleverer bird. Ha! notwithstanding your small regard for genealogical matters, you have given the subject sufficient attention to be aware that if Scocco was your mother's name, and not your father's, you ought by rights to have some other name than Scocco. Very just, and very true. By rights, as we say. But how by wrongs? Things do not always go by rights in this world."

"Do they ever? That's more like the question, I think, Signor ——. You have not told me yet who I am to thank for my dinner. May I ask what is your name by rights?"

"I am the Dottore Anastasio Profondi, attorney-at-law," said the stranger, gravely bowing.

"I have never had the advantage of hearing your name before, Signor Dottore, though you seem so well acquainted with all that concerns me—at least, with many things," added Nanni, hastening to correct himself.

"With some things; with some things," returned the lawyer, bowing and smiling. "But as we were saying, things in this world do not always go by rights;—fortunately, for if they did, what would become of us lawyers, eh, Signor Scocco? Not always by rights; and sometimes by wrongs,

you see, people are called by the names of their mothers. Now your mother's name was Scocco—Anna Scocco, the daughter of old Simone, the sacristan. I never had the pleasure of seeing the lady, but I have heard that she was exceedingly beautiful."

"*My* mother?" said the Gufone, with a sort of cynical bitterness; "I suppose she died of the first sight of me! And, pray, Signor Dottore, since you have invited me to dinner to hear all about myself, would you have any objection to tell me, for mere curiosity sake—not that I care two straws about it—what ugly dog it could have been who was my father?"

"Ay! Signor Scocco, that is the question! I *have* had the pleasure of seeing the gentleman in question many years ago, and I can assure you that he was not an ugly dog. It is many years since he died."

"Ah! I suppose he could not survive the sight of *me* either!" returned the Gufo with the same cynical sneer.

"I am not aware of the precise cause of his death," returned the lawyer gravely, "but it is true that your birth was a cause of trouble to him. And

that brings me back to the more pertinent observation you favoured me with just now, respecting the cause of your having borne your mother's name in preference to your father's. You remarked rightly that people usually are called by the name of their father. Are you aware that there is a class of exceptions to this rule?"

"No," said the Gufo, staring at his questioner, "I know nothing about it, and care less, as I told you. I suppose that when children are such as I am, nobody will own them, and then the mother has to call 'em by her own name."

"Not exactly so. That is not the precise reason. And perhaps I may be permitted to observe, in order to prevent misapprehension, that if you, signor, had happened to have been born in the exact likeness of the Apollo Belvedere, your birth would not have been one whit less a cause of the trouble I alluded to just now. But to stick—with your permission, Signor Scocco—to the question of names, which is more within the province of us lawyers, I was going to point out to you that there is a class—a very large class, ahem!—of exceptions to the rule that a child is called by the name of his father. It is the class of persons

who are the children of fathers and mothers who are not married."

"Ah! I see," said the Gufo; "and they by wrongs are called after the name of their mother. I partly knew that, but I did not understand what you were driving at. And I don't understand that yet, if you will excuse me for saying so, signor."

"Quite right, Signor Scocco, quite right. But I trust that you will understand very shortly if you will continue to give me your attention a little longer."

"Oh, as for that, Signor Dottore, I am bound, you know. I promised you that in return for the dinner."

"Permit me to say, Signor Scocco, that you have an admirable—and if, as it may perhaps be permissible under the circumstances to suppose, a naturally acquired, then in such case a very remarkable—notion of the nature and force of a contract, even oral," said the lawyer, with a bow and a smile of approval. "To return, however, to the more immediate subject of our discourse—I was observing that children born of parents between whom no marriage has taken place, have, according to law, no right to bear the name of the father. You, therefore,

have always borne the name of your mother, the daughter of Simone, the sacristan."

"And I suppose it matters very little, except as a matter of curiosity, as I said, what the name of my father was?" remarked the Gufone carelessly; "he don't seem to have troubled himself much about me, since it was always old Simone who did what was needed to keep my ugly body and soul together."

"The only trouble your father took in the matter, Signor Scocco, was to assure himself, as far as he could, that he should never hear anything about you more. No marriage had taken place between him and the sacristan's daughter, your mother, when you were born, and it was not then contemplated that any ever should take place."

"Yes, I think I understand all that," said the Gufone cynically.

"And if that had been the end of the story," continued the lawyer, "there would have been nothing more to be said about it. You would never have heard anything of your father, and your father never would have heard of you. And you would have been Nanni Scocco, the son of your mother, and the son of no father at all, for the rest of

the chapter. But that was *not* the end of the story."

"I begin to think it never had any end, Signor Dottore. However, the dinner was a very excellent dinner, and I am not going to be worse than my word," said the Gufone, with resignation.

"Bravo, Signor Scocco! There is an end to the story, and we are just coming within sight of it. Your mother, signor, did not die, as you surmised just now, but she did die after a long period of illness, two or three years after your birth. And it so happened that your father, falling into ill-health, was very evidently near the end of his days near about the same time. Now, old Simone, the sacristan, was, and is, a very religious man."

"Ah, that he was! I remember that well enough," acquiesced the Gufone heartily; "many's the time my shoulders have been black and blue, as well as my stomach empty, because grandfather was so religious. God forbid there should be many poor boys' fathers or grandfathers so religious as he was!"

Signor Dottore Profondi laughed a little, low, quiet laugh, and then proceeded without further heeding Nanni's interruption.



“And being a very religious man, he was exceedingly unwilling that his daughter should die without having been duly reconciled and put right in the sight of the Church by a marriage with your father. Had your father been in good health and strength, and likely to live, it is probable that nothing that old Simone could have done, would have availed to obtain what he wished. But as it was, he did eventually obtain it. And a short time—a very short time before your mother’s death, and not long before your father’s death, a marriage was celebrated between them with all due and proper forms, both legal and ecclesiastical. Now, Signor Scocco, do you know what the effect of that marriage was as regarded you?” asked the lawyer, throwing himself suddenly back in his seat, and looking hard at Nanni, with his head very much on one side.

“It had no effect upon me at all!” said Nanni shortly.

“Now there, Signor Scocco, you must excuse me if I correct you. It had a very important effect on you and your position in the world. It made you a legitimate, instead of an illegitimate child. It gave you a right to your father’s name, and to your father’s inheritance.”

“But as the world goes by wrongs, instead of by rights, all that mattered to me very little then, and matters less now. I did not get one kick or cuff the less from my religious grandfather; and I was none the less called Nanni Scocco, as I was before,” said Nanni.

“Very true; and all that was, as you very justly say, signor, because the world often goes by wrongs, instead of by rights. But sometimes —sometimes the wrongs get righted, as you shall see. How was it that the marriage of your father and mother produced none of the effects that it ought to have produced at the time? Because the father of your father was not so religious a man as old Simone, the sacristan, and he was by no means as desirous that the marriage should take place as the father of your mother was. Doubtless he would never have suffered it to take place at all, had it not been that his eldest son, your father, was known to be in a dying state at the time. As it was, your father, desirous as his days were drawing to a close, to repair, as far as lay in his power, the wrong he had done to your mother, and your grandfather did together induce him to consent that the ceremony should take place. But

at the same time he took care that the thing should be so managed that the only proof of it remained in his hands. And when your father and mother were both dead, old Simone, the father of your mother, found that the other old gentleman, the father of your father, altogether refused to admit or recognise the marriage in any way. And you remained under the care of your grandfather, the sacristan, because your grandfather, the gentleman, would have nothing to say to you, and you continued to be called Nanni Scocco, because the latter denied that you had any right to bear his name."

"But I *had* a right, according to what you say, Signor Dottore?" remarked the Gufone.

"An unquestionable right!" replied the lawyer, nodding his head emphatically.

"And I *have* a right to do so now?" again said the Gufone, scratching his head.

"Right again!" said the lawyer; "most undoubtedly you have."

"But what is the use of the right, if I don't know what the name is? And why did grandfather never tell me?" asked Nanni meditatively.

"Because he was a poor sacristan, and your other grandfather was a rich nobleman, and he was un-

willing to offend him and quarrel with him, especially as nothing could be got by doing so, since he could not prove the marriage."

"And pray, Signor Dottore, do you know this name that there was a fuss about? I should think it must be a prettier one than Scocco! A nobleman you say, too, my grandfather—the father of my father was?" said Nanni, who seemed to have been moved at last to acknowledge some little interest in the revelations which the stranger had been making to him.

"Yes, signor, I do know the name which you are entitled to bear; and my main object in seeking the present opportunity was to communicate it to you. But there are one or two further circumstances which it will be better to put you in possession of first. You would like to hear, too, probably how I came to know all this, and why I have sought you out to tell it to you. Shall we have some coffee, or another flask of Orvieto, to amuse us while I talk and you listen?"

Nanni, with Italian sobriety, chose the coffee, saying he had had wine enough.

"So have I," said the lawyer, calling *bottega* to order the coffee. They were sitting in a little

back room, which they had, and at that hour of the day were pretty safe to have, all to themselves.

“Wait till he has brought us the coffee,” said Profondi; “these *trattoria* boys have long ears; and I don’t want to tell my story to all Rome.”

The coffee was brought. The lawyer took a cigar from his pocket, and offered another to his guest. And thus fortified for the ordeal, Nanni Scocco, who was to be Nanni Scocco no longer, prepared himself for the sequel of his family history.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE AUGURY OF THE BIRDS.

"I GUESSED I must be somebody better than I knew of," said Nanni, musingly, while the lawyer lighted his cigar; having lighted his own, and savoured the first whiff of it, before Profondi had applied the sulphurous match to his. "I thought as much."

"Thought so, signor? Do you mean that any hint of this story has ever reached you before?" said the lawyer, speaking with more earnestness than his manner had yet shown.

"No, Signor Dottore, not that. But I thought so from the birds," said Nanni, nodding at the lawyer.

"The birds!" repeated Dottore Profondi, much

puzzled. "Ah! I see!" he added, after a minute's thought, "you allude, Signor Scocco, to the omens drawn by the vulgar—pardon me!—from the flight of certain birds. Three jackdaws to the right; two magpies on the left; a raven overhead, and the like. Remnants of pagan superstition, my dear sir, to which I, for my own part, attach no significance. So you had observed certain of these auguries, which led you to imagine that a change of destiny might be in store for you! Mere coincidence, my dear sir; mere coincidence."

"Yes; I know all the ways those country girls have of frightening themselves,—and the men, too, sometimes, for that matter," said Nanni, slowly; "but I don't put any faith in them myself, any more than you do, Signor Dottore. No; the birds I was thinking of had done with flying. I meant the *arrosto*—the dish of thrushes we have been eating. People don't give an *arrosto* of thrushes to the likes of Nanni Scocco. The *frittata*—well, a poor devil like me may eat a *frittata* now and again. The *umido*—well, it was coming it rather strong; but still, for once and a way, I *have* eaten an *umido* before. But an *arrosto* of thrushes! *Vi pare!* When I saw the birds, I said to myself

that Il Gufone must be somebody else besides Nanni Scocco!"

"Ha! ha! very good! very good! A new sort of divination! Divination from examination of the bill of fare. Thrushes for the Marchese! ortolans for the Cardinal! and oysters from Baiæ for the Pope's barber! Not so new, though, perhaps, after all!" added Dottore Profondi, speaking more to himself than his guest.

"No; I don't think it is new!" said Nanni, quietly.

The lawyer looked at the queer figure opposite to him curiously for a minute, then nodded two or three times, as who should say, "Yes, strange as it may seem, there are real human brains, and a fair lot of them too, in that great red shock head!"

"Any way, signor, your divination was correct. But you will understand the story I have to tell best if you will let me tell it in my own way. We will go straight on from the point we had reached before the coffee came in. A marriage was performed in due form, and with all necessary regularity, between your father and mother; you, from being an illegitimate child, with no claim on your father's name or property, were thereby made into a legiti-



mate child, having such claims. But your parents both died, and the proofs of this marriage were in the hands of your paternal grandfather, who chose to suppress them, and to refuse to recognise any such claims. All is clear to you, my dear sir, so far ? ”

“ Quite clear, Signor Dottore ! A pretty set of *birbanti* I seem to have descended from ! ”

“ We shall not lay claim to any heritage of moral qualities,” said the lawyer, after a long and slowly ejected puff of tobacco-smoke. “ But I will tell you why the gentleman in question chose to suppress the proofs of his son’s marriage.”

“ Why, I think even I can guess that, Signor Dottore,” said Nanni ; “ because his son had married a poor sacristan’s daughter, instead of some grand lady.”

“ Quite so ; quite so,” returned the lawyer ; “ but the Marchese, — for a marchese he was, — would have preferred to recognise the marriage with the sacristan’s daughter, and the heir which had been born of that family, if he had supposed that, failing that heir, his family would soon be without any. But at the time of his eldest one’s death, he had two other sons, healthy and likely to live, of whom

one at least was also likely to marry and have children. Therefore the old Marchese preferred that the son of his second son, who he hoped would be born from some noble alliance, should be the heir to the family name and property, instead of the son of his eldest son, who was the child of the sacristan's daughter. All that is intelligible enough, is it not?" concluded the lawyer.

"Oh, yes; quite intelligible,—the old rascal being a Marchese!" said the cynical Nanni.

"Oh, fie! Signor Nanni! Why, don't you see, that you are one yourself? Well, after a year or two, the old Marchese died, and his second son succeeded to the title and the property. There was no question any more about the marriage of his elder brother or of the child which had been born of it. The one was well-nigh forgotten; and the other was out of sight. It is probable enough that the new Marchese, your uncle, never knew that his brother had been really and truly married. He had probably heard that something had been said about it,—that it was no real marriage; that the parties interested had not been able to prove any marriage, and had abandoned any hope of doing so.

The whole thing was laid aside and forgotten. And then, too, to put the matter at rest more completely, the real heir ran away and was lost sight of, and perhaps never would have been heard of any more, if he had not been hunted up by one Dottore Anastasio Profondi, who found him out, and gave him an *arrosto* of thrushes as a foretaste of his coming fortune."

"If the after-taste is only as good as the foretaste, Signor Dottore, I shall be much beholden to you! But you have not told me yet who this excellent and amiable old grandfather of mine was," said Nanni.

"Patience, signor; and another cup of coffee, eh? I am coming to that all in good time; but you must let me tell my story, as I said, in my own way. Well, the next event in it is that your uncle, the second son of the old Marchese, died without any children. And then his younger brother, the third son of your grandfather, succeeded to the title, under special circumstances, and now holds it. He has no son, and is not likely to have one; but he has a daughter. He also in his turn succeeded to the title and the estates,—at least to a part of them; for his brother had alienated some of them,—with-

out any thought of the forgotten and lost son of his eldest brother, and probably without any knowledge that he had ever contracted any valid marriage. And now it remains to be explained how it has come to pass that this marriage, the proof of which has been so long suppressed, can be proved now; and how it has happened that I, Il Dottore Anastasio Profondi, attorney-at-law, have the honour and the pleasure, Signore Marchese, of speaking to you on the subject."

"Meaning me," said Nanni. "Marchese! Il Marchese Gufone! Ha! ha! ha! But, with all respect, Signor Dottore, are you not counting the chickens a little before they are hatched?"

"I think not, Signore Marchese; I think not. The hatching has reached that point at which the breaking of the shell may be commenced at any moment. Thus it came to pass. When the Marchese, the second son of your grandfather,—Adriano his name was,—when the Marchese Adriano died, his younger brother was not on the spot. The Marchese died at the family villa in the country, where his father had lived and died before him; and his brother was at the time at Rome. This brother, the third son of your grandfather, and the present

holder of the estates, was a churchman and a monsignore. But he was only in deacon's orders; and his brother having died without leaving any heir to the family, he applied for and obtained a dispensation, and abandoned the ecclesiastical career. While he was still at Rome, however,—there being no one of the family on the spot,—a certain person, an old dependant of the family, and an ecclesiastic, was employed to superintend the servants of the villa and to take charge of the property and papers and other matters of the deceased Marchese. Now I am inclined to suppose that the reverend gentleman in question was not altogether satisfied with the treatment he had met with at the hands of his patrons, the great family at the villa. The late Marchese, having no child, and his brother being, as he imagined, irrevocably vowed to the ecclesiastical profession, had adopted a certain profession, and had adopted a certain cousin as heir to the family honour; a young lad he was at the time when this preferment was announced to him, and the reverend gentleman I have spoken of was appointed to be his tutor. I am inclined to imagine, I say, that perhaps in this relationship the parties did not get on so well together as to produce a cordial affection

on the part of the tutor towards his patrons. Be this as it may, however, it did so happen that the reverend gentleman in question, in dealing with the papers left by the late Marchese, as he had been instructed to do, came upon the suppressed proofs and certificates of your father's marriage with the daughter of old Simone Scocco, the sacristan. It did so happen also, that under the circumstances, he felt it to be his duty to communicate these facts and these papers to the old sacristan, and eventually also to a brother of his, who was a lawyer, and who, on looking into the matter, found that there was not the slightest flaw in the perfect evidence of the marriage, and that the son of the old Marchese's eldest son, and of the sacristan's daughter, was, if he could be found, the undoubted heir to the family estates ; not to that portion only which the third son, the present Marchese, as he supposes himself, received as his inheritance from his brother, but to that portion also which that brother, the second son, had alienated to the young cousin he had intended to make his heir. For the lands were not his to dispose of, in that or in any other manner. I have further to mention, Signor Marchese, that the reverend gentleman who discovered these im-

portant papers was my brother, the Reverend Michele Profondi of Arcidosso."

"The Rev. Michele Profondi!" faltered Nanni, staring with wide eyes and dropped jaw at the lawyer opposite to him; "the Rev. Michele Profondi!"

"Yes, signor! That is his name. It was he who, as I told you, discovered the proofs of the marriage among the papers of the Marchese, and who placed the matter in my hands—my brother, the Rev. Michele Profondi of Arcidosso."

"*O Dio mio!* The Rev. Michele Profondi!" again ejaculated Il Gufone, evidently much agitated, to the infinite astonishment of his companion.

"Certainly, signor—the Rev. Michele Profondi. Pray, may I ask what there is in the communication of that name to move you so?" asked the lawyer, in utter perplexity.

"Why, Michele Profondi of Arcidosso!—that was the name of the tutor of Signor Cesare Casaloni," stammered Nanni, utterly overwhelmed with the discovery which this name carried with it, and with the sudden perception of all the consequences, as regarded Leonora, which the discovery involved.

"To be sure! That is what I have been telling

you, signor, for ever such a while," returned the lawyer, somewhat testily.

"No, signore, you didn't," replied Nanni, reproachfully. "You never said a word about Casaloni. How was I to know who the people you have been talking about were, till you mentioned the Rev. Michele Profondi? I knew that he had been tutor to Signor Cesare Casaloni, because I remember to have heard him say so."

"True, true, signor; I had not mentioned the name. You are right. And you have known this Signor Cesare Casaloni, then? Very strange! But, Signor Marchese, that does not explain, if you will excuse me for saying so, why the discovery of the name of your family should disturb you in such a manner. Why not Casaloni as well as any other? Marchese Casaloni! It is a very good name you find yourself the owner of; and a very good fortune, too, allow me to tell you."

"Marchese Casaloni! Then you really mean, Signor Dottore, that I—I, as you see me here now—am the Marchese Casaloni—I, and nobody else?" said Nanni, in a grave voice, and with a serious manner that he had not evinced before.

"Assuredly, *mio buon signor*! That is what I do



mean to say ; just exactly that, and nothing else. You, and you only, are at this moment the Marchese Casaloni, and the rightful possessor of all the large properties belonging to that ancient and noble family. There is no doubt or mistake about it."

"*Mamma mia!*" ejaculated Nanni, in the queer and grotesque phrase which a Tuscan peasant often uses to express the extremity of astonishment, and which in his mouth is in no wise disconnected with perfect seriousness of mind.

"Yes; the history is a sufficiently remarkable one," said the lawyer, in reply to Nanni's ejaculation. "What a providence that my brother should have found the papers, and should have been inspired to communicate the facts to *me!* May I ask, Signor Marchese, under what circumstances it occurred to you to become acquainted with the Signor Cesare Casaloni? He was the cousin I spoke of, who had been selected to be the heir to the family name and honours, and who will now have to vacate that desirable position."

"*Dio mio! Dio mio!*" again exclaimed the Gufone, quite unable to recover himself from the effect that the thoughts which kept crowding on his mind produced on him. "How did I become

acquainted with the Signor Cesare, you say, Signor Dottore? He was in exile for conspiring against the Pope's government, and was in hiding; and that's when I knew him. But he has been pardoned, and has come back to Rome. He came here with me yesterday."

"Indeed! Yes. The Marchese Ercole—Marchese, as he thinks himself—he that was the monsignore—obtained his pardon for him," said the lawyer.

"Yes; and you said, Signor Dottore, that he—the monsignore who turned Marchese, the youngest brother of my father — had a daughter?" said Nanni, as all the facts respecting that daughter, of which he had been cognisant, crowded into his mind. Of late years, while he had been watching Leonora grow from childhood into her lovely girlhood, and had been gradually suffering himself to be enthralled by a love for her, which he well knew was a hopeless love, he had, if not absolutely forgotten the part he had taken in bringing her from the home of her parents into that wild home, into which he, more than any other, might be said to have reared her, and the subsequent part he had played in the substitution of Vallardi's child for

her, when the little Stella was taken to the Innocenti,—if he had not absolutely forgotten all this, it had lapsed so far away into the dim background of memory as to have been practically out of sight. But now all these circumstances, and the facts that resulted from them, came thronging back into his mind, and produced a whirl of thoughts there which were almost too much for him.

“Yes; the monsignore had a daughter, whom he has, since the death of his brother, legitimatised by marrying her mother. *That* is a curious story, too. The child, it seems, was sent away to a foundling hospital at Florence; and has now been sought out and claimed by the parents, and legitimatised, as I said.”

“The monsignore and the child’s mother, then, knew where the child had been sent, and had the means of finding her?” asked the Gufone in considerable surprise.

“So it would seem. I know very little about it; only what has become common talk in Rome from the strangeness of the story. They say that the young lady has been brought home, and that she is extremely pretty. They say, too, that the plan is to make up a match between her and this young

Cesare Casaloni, her cousin. And a very natural thing to do," added the lawyer; "for, as I mentioned, the late Marchese Adriano, your father's brother, left a large portion of the estate to him; and by making a marriage between him and the daughter of the Marchese Ercole, you see, the property will be kept together, and all in the family. A very good plan—only that we shall spoil it a little, eh, Signor Marchese?" said the lawyer.

"The Signor Cesare to marry the girl who has been brought back from the Innocenti!" said Nanni, in a sort of hazy bewilderment.

"So they say. And it would be the most natural arrangement in the world under the circumstances," returned the lawyer.

Nanni remained silent, plunged in deep thought, for some minutes, while the Dottore Anastasio Profondi sat looking at him, and trying to guess what were the thoughts that were passing through his mind; which, as the reader may guess, he utterly failed in doing, despite a very considerable share of shrewdness and lawyer-like acumen.

"And is the young lady—she that has been fetched home from the Innocenti—now in Rome?" asked Nanni at length.

“No, I fancy not. My brother writes me that she has been brought to the Villa Casaloni, near Arcidosso. No doubt they will all go there—the Marchese Ercole, and his old love and new wife, and Signor Cesare. And then you see, Signor Marchese, there comes a question about the proper time for letting our cat out of the bag. It would be perhaps no more than right to let them know the truth before this marriage—if, as I have little doubt, there is to be such a marriage—is fixed. But then I don’t want to say a word till I have got everything quite in readiness, to prevent any possibility of dispute. And it is always well to be safe, and to leave nothing to chance. If they are in a great hurry about it, I am afraid the young folks will find out that there was no reason for marrying, when it is too late.”

“Perhaps it may be that Signor Cesare will not enter into any scheme of the sort,” said Nanni, musingly. “It cannot have been proposed to him yet; for he only came to Rome with me yesterday; and certainly he had heard nothing about any such cousin then.”

“Well, may be not; though it seems a very sensible arrangement—knowing no more than they

know," said the lawyer. "And now, Signor Marchese," he continued, "it is necessary that I should ask you whether you are disposed to honour me with your instructions to bring this affair to its proper close,—to take, that is, whatever steps may be necessary for restoring you to your rightful position and the recovery of your property. Hitherto, as you will observe, I have acted in the matter merely from a sense of right, and by the authority, as far as he could give any authority in the matter, of old Simone Scocco, the sacristan at Arcidosso. But now it is necessary that I should act in your behalf, and by your authority, if you think fit to confide the matter to my care. I need hardly tell you that it shall have my very best attention and zeal."

"But who will pay you for your trouble, Signor Dottore," said Nanni, with the characteristic caution of a Tuscan peasant, "in case you do not succeed in making me Marchese Casaloni? I am very sure I shall not; and perhaps you can understand why. It is as well to prevent disappointment."

"Quite right, Signor Marchese. It shall be perfectly understood between us, then, that you shall not be called upon, or expected to disburse one

*soldo*, or to reward or recompense my trouble and expenses in any way, until after I have succeeded in restoring to you the title and the property which you inherit from your father. Will that be right?"

"Quite right, Signor Dottore; that will suit me exactly," said Nanni.

"And I may consider that I have your orders to pursue this matter, and to act for you in all ways that may be necessary to secure our object," rejoined Dottore Anastasio.

"Yes, Signor Dottore; all right! You make me Marchese Casaloni and a rich man, and I won't haggle about the bill. But if your scheme breaks down, devil a stiver will you get from me, for the best of all reasons."

"Perhaps, Signor Marchese, you may not have in hand any funds to enable you to remain in Rome while this matter is being brought to a conclusion. If so, I shall be happy to supply you. I have little fear, you see, of not succeeding."

"Thank you kindly, Signor Dottore," replied Nanni; "but I don't want to stay in Rome just at present, and I have money enough to carry me home, when I want to go—more especially as you

have given me a dinner that will last me till I get there."

"But it will be necessary that I should see you, signor," rejoined the lawyer; "and if you are away——"

"Well, see then, Signor Dottore; you shall let me have a little money—three or four scudi—just enough for me to get to Rome, and you shan't be long before you see me again. I travel cheaper, I should think, than most other marcheses, and I shall not want above three or four scudi. With that much in my pocket, I can come to Rome, and you shall be sure to see me before long."

"Very well, then; so be it, Signor Marchese. Remember that you are quite welcome to a larger sum, if you like to take it. How long do you suppose it will be before I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in Rome again?"

"When do you suppose you shall want me, Signor Dottore? — that's the question," said Nanni.

"Well, let me see. Carnival will be coming towards the end; there is little to be done at such a time. Shall we say that you will be here within the first week of Lent?"



“ Good ! ” said Nanni. “ Where shall I find you, Signor Dottore ? ”

“ There, ” said the lawyer, putting a card into his client’s hand, “ there — any hour from ten till four. ”

And so Il Gufone and his lawyer parted,—the latter to laugh to himself over the present he was about to make to the Roman aristocracy, and the former to make the best of his way to the Civita Vecchia gate, longing for a quiet hour to think over the extraordinary tidings he had heard.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GUFO'S RETURN TO HIS NEST.

No Achilles ever wandered among the tents oppressed with more distracting and torturing thoughts than those which besieged the Gufone—Marchese Casaloni—on his road from Rome to Talamone. They availed even to make the journey a longer one to him than it had ever been before. For instead of speeding along, often across country, at his usual flibbertygibbet sort of pace, something between a hop, skip, and a run, he sauntered along the road, with his eyes on the stones at his feet, paying little attention either to space or time, or to anything save the billowy sea of thoughts with which the strange story of the Dottore Anastasio Profondi had filled his heart and mind. He was four days in doing the journey, adhering mechanically, Marchese though

he was, to his old mode of seeking easily-found shelter for the night in any barn or out-house, and buying what little sustenance he needed at the wayside shops of bread and *salame*.

Yet he was anxious to arrive at his journey's end. He was eager to be at the lone house on the promontory, and to see and speak with Leonora; and yet—yet he feared the moment when he should come face to face with her, and felt that he was not yet prepared for it. For it was necessary to make up his mind what he should say to her. And this he had by no means yet accomplished.

Should he tell her all the facts of which he had become cognisant?—the whole of Doctor Profondi's story, supplemented by his own knowledge of her own history? Should he let her know at once who she herself was, and who he was; and explain the cousinship that existed between them? Above all, should he add to this the reports which went to show that she was betrayed and abandoned—that Cesare had forgotten her as soon as he had turned his back on Talamone, and that he was ready at the first call of interest to speak to another those words of love which he had so recently poured into her ears? Should he let her at once understand the

difference between the pretended love of this worthless stranger, whose outward semblance had so fascinated her, and the undying affection which might have been hers, had she been able to recognise worth beneath a repulsive exterior? Should he tell her all this?

He could not help feeling and being conscious of a strong temptation to do so. He caught his heart in the act of taking pleasure at the idea of the pain she would suffer in discovering the faithlessness and worthlessness of her lover. And having thus caught his heart in the fact, he grievously and with tears of pain and contrition rebuked his heart for the wickedness and perversity of contemplating with satisfaction anything that could give pain to Leonora.

And then was it certain that Cesare was thus base and faithless? On the contrary, it was mere surmise that he would be so. He had himself remarked to the lawyer that it was not possible that Cesare should have as yet consented to the matrimonial plans proposed to him. How would Cesare act when the proposition should be made to him? That was the great question—the greatest question of all—a greater question than any of those

relating to the birth and parentage of himself or of Leonora. If only this tall, stupid, handsome Cesare could be let to go and be a Marchese, and marry a Marchesa of his own sort, and leave him and Leonora to live forgotten among their wild Maremma hills, and Leonora could come to love him! If only!—if only! *Ah Dio!* if only that could be! He was slouching along the road like a poor Gufone, as he was, at a place where it skirted one of the wide shallow pools so frequent in that district. The motionless water was as clear on its dark-green bed of weeds as any mirror. And the outcast Marchese turned aside from the dusty path, as these thoughts were seething in his mind, to look at himself in the looking-glass thus held up to him by nature.

Leonora love him!

He snatched a huge stone, lying loose on the top of an unmortared dwarf wall by his side, and dashed it into the face of the pool that told him the hideous and odious truth, shivering the reflection into thousands of obliterating ripples. Then he turned back to the arid and dusty track, and plodded on with hanging head, and the certainty burning his heart that never in this world could any such happiness

be his, as had mocked him by presenting itself to his imagination.

Yet he could not help wishing that it might so turn out that Cesare would yield to the temptation presented to him, and be false to his Maremma love. And he justified this to himself by the consideration that in any case this Cesare was unworthy of the priceless treasure which the vantage of circumstance had thrown into his hands. Still he had no right to hint any suspicion of Cesare's truth, till there should be better grounds for doubting it. And he quite made up his mind to say no word on this subject to Leonora.

Should he tell her of the probabilities that were awaiting him ;—that in all probability it was he, and not Cesare, who was going to inherit rank and fortune? He felt that he shrank from doing so. Why should he? Could he suppose that any such circumstances would have any influence on the matter that was nearest to his heart? He spurned the suggestion of the possibility of such a thing. Might not the tidings, indeed, be more likely to make Leonora's heart cleave yet more closely to Cesare in his misfortune? Might they not cause him, who was to be the means of this misfortune to the

man she loved, to become yet more odious to her? If it were first proved to her that Cesare was false, before any knowledge of this strange freak of fortune should reach her, he would at least escape this last misery. So he decided—he thought that he finally made up his mind—to say nothing for the present, on reaching Talamone, of the greatness that was about to be thrust upon him.

But he thought that, on the other hand, he would tell Leonora the truth about her own birth and parentage. He began to wonder at himself that he had never done so before—that he had never even thought of doing so. It certainly was not the fear of Sandro Vallardi that had prevented him. The Gufone was not much given to be afraid of any man. Not that he could, or had any idea that he could, have withstood Vallardi face to face, and strength for strength. But the Gufone had rather a contempt for mere animal strength; and, had the case occurred of mortal anger between him and Sandro, would have trusted with perfect confidence to some method of eluding or circumventing, much as Ulysses showed himself too much for the Cyclops.

It certainly was not that he had been prevented from ever telling Leonora all he knew by fear of

Sandro. But, strange as it now seemed to him, it had absolutely never occurred to him to do so. He had almost forgotten all about it. He had seen Leonora grow up in her wild home, and had never dreamed of the possibility of her ever being re-transplanted to one more truly hers. But now he began to think that he ought to tell her. It had become clear that things could not go on much longer as they were. It was out of the question to think of his going away from the old Maremma life to be the Marchese Casaloni, and leaving his first cousin, the daughter of his father's brother, under the roof of Sandro Vallardi—all the more when he knew, further, that her place had been usurped by Vallardi's daughter—the infant whom he had, now seventeen or eighteen years ago, helped to deposit in the Innocent hospital at Florence.

No; upon this point also he thought that he had made up his mind. He would tell Leonora all about her own birth, leaving the facts concerning his to be known when they had further developed themselves. But how would she receive the information? Would she be eager immediately to act upon it? Would she wish that



Cesare should be made aware of the truth without loss of time? And if, indeed, Doctor Profondi's suppositions were true, and a match were to be arranged between Cesare and Stella, under the supposition that Stella was his cousin, and Leonora were to be informed of his falseness, what would she then wish to do?

She would know that her lover was false to her for the sake of marrying one holding a certain position, which position, in truth, belonged to her, and not to that other, if only the truth were known. It would be to her, if only this truth were known, that Cesare would be desirous of offering that interested homage which he had formerly offered to her from a different motive. To bring back her false and fickle lover to her feet, it would only be necessary for her to appear to him to be what she really was. How would Leonora—the Leonora he so passionately though so hopelessly loved—the Leonora who had grown up under his care, and been fashioned and moulded by his thought and his brain—how would she act, how wish to act, under the circumstances?

The more Il Gufone thought of all these things, the more he was persuaded that it was right that he

should delay no longer in letting her know her own real history. And having settled this point, his mind reverted to his own specially personal prospects. He was to be a Marchese, and rich; and the riches he was to have would be those that would have belonged to Leonora and Cesare. Ah! that accursed combination! it *would* always return! Yes; the wealth, that but for his existence would have belonged to them! Would it not be better that he should throw himself into one of those pools, that told him the truth of his hideous appearance to his face? Would not the world be better without such a blot on it? What good were the riches to him—to him, alone in the world, with no human soul to love him!—with Leonora loving another! Would it not be better far to get out of the way, and let them have the riches—they, who could be happy with them—Cesare and Leonora happy together in each other's love, and be under the clod out of their way, and insensible to the sight of it? Would it not be better—better for everybody, so?

Very bitter, very, very bitter, were the thoughts that bore the Gufone company, as towards the afternoon of the fourth day after he left Rome,

he plodded along, weary and footsore, between the mass of Monte Argentario on the left hand and the lake of Orbetello on the right. He was getting near home now;—*home!*—only about ten more miles, along the shore up to Talamone! That same evening he should see her—speak to her!

Wearily he plodded on! He was amazed at himself for feeling so weary. He used never to know what it was to feel as he felt now. But heart-soreness is harder to travel with than foot-soreness. Wearily and sadly he plodded on;—reached the end of the *stagno* between Orbetello and the sand-hills of the coast;—reached desolate little Talamone, the desolateness of which seemed more sadly desolate to him than ever;—mechanically climbed the hill to the lone house on the promontory; reached the well-known door, and with a beating heart, lifted the latch and entered.



## CHAPTER V.

### A DIFFERENT SCENE AT THE OLD TRYSTING-PLACE.

ON entering, Il Gufone found Leonora alone in the large room, on which the outer door of the house opened, and which, as has been explained, served the family for all the purposes of living in by day. Lucia was for the moment up-stairs; and Leonora was engaged in making the small and simple preparations for the evening meal of herself and her mother. There was a large blazing fire of faggots and huge unsplit logs on the wide hearth,—enough wood to have furnished the consumption of a Florence family for a week! But in the Maremma firewood is cheap—to be had, indeed, in Vallardi's case, for the cutting—and large fires are good sanitary precautions. Not that the lone house on the rocky promontory, exposed to every

blast from the sea, was much subject to malaria ; it was especially free from it : but the huge fire was not the less cheerful and pleasant. The only light by which Leonora was preparing the supper-table came from the high-leaping flames. And the large room, with its distant angles in capricious light and shade, and the varied outline of the miscellaneous objects of all sorts, which occupied its wall-spaces or hung dependent from its rafters, and in the midst of all this, the light and graceful figure of Leonora in her red petticoat and tight-fitting white bodice, contrasting well with the abundance of her raven's wing hair, flitting about in the pursuit of her domestic cares by the changing and glancing light of the blazing hearth, made a pleasing and strongly characterised picture of home-life, which would have afforded an admirable study to a painter of such scenes.

Il Gufone was glad, and yet almost frightened, at the chance which thus ordered his meeting with Leonora. He felt as if it would be impossible for him to meet her without betraying, in some degree, some of the various emotions which were so busy within him. And he was glad that there should be no other eyes present, not even the unobservant ones

of the Signora Lucia, to spy any difference there might be in his usual manner. Yet the sudden meeting with Leonora alone made it seem almost impossible that he should not at once say to her some of the many things which he was so much longing, yet so much fearing, to say to her alone. He felt, suddenly, a new and strange shyness in her presence, which puzzled and pained him.

He was relieved, however, in an instant, or, at all events, the manner of his meeting with his cousin was settled for him by her own assumption of the initiative. Leonora had no consciousness of any feeling or thought which could have the effect of causing her to find any difficulty in meeting her old friend and companion in every respect as she had been wont to do any time for the last ten years.

“Oh, Gufone!” she exclaimed, coming forward, with both hands extended towards him,—none the less because one of them held a couple of napkins, which she had just been taking from a large old walnut-wood press that glistened and blinked in the fire-light in one corner of the room; “Oh, Gufone! I am so glad to see you! Why, what has become of you? We thought that you would

have been here two or three days ago! Father was so angry that you did not come. But he has gone away now,—two days ago; and he will forget all about it before he comes back. Mother will be so glad you are come. I must call her. Mother!” she called, running to the foot of the stairs—“mother! here is the Gufone, at last! Make haste down, and let us get him some supper! I *am* so glad you have come! I have been wanting to see you. It has been very dull here—very dull!” she repeated, with a sigh, as a shadow passed over her face, which the next moment’s thought chased away;—“very dull! But now there are so many things that you will be able to tell me! I *am* glad to see you back again, you dear, old Gufone! But you seem very tired; and you are dreadfully in want of your supper, I dare say. Poor Gufone! you seem regularly done up; and that is not like you!”

All this time Nanni had said no word. After shaking hands with him, and drawing hers rather quickly away, with a movement that, little marked as it was, did not escape the notice of Gufone, nor fail to make its own special little stab felt in his heart, she had been busying herself, as she ran

on with her prattle, in adding to her supper-table preparations.

“Yes, Signora Leonora, I am tired; more than usual, I think; and I am sure I don’t know why, for I have not travelled far to-day. On the contrary,” said poor Nanni, as he slouched forward towards the hearth, and sat down in the corner of it, over the blazing and crackling fire. “And so, Signor Sandro was very angry, was he?”

“Yes, he was angry because you were longer gone than he expected; but he is away now. I wouldn’t tease myself with being afraid of him, if I was you, Gufone.”

“I am not afraid of Sandro Vallardi, Signora Leonora! I never was afraid of him, even when I was a boy,” said the Gufone, with something like a sneer. “But, somehow or other, I *am* very tired. I suppose it has been very dull here, as you say, ever since I went away; for somebody else went with me, and I am afraid my coming back will not mend the dullness.”

Leonora became crimson all over her face and neck. There was nothing in the words the Gufone had said to show that any thought was in his mind, which she did not well know before was there, or



that alluded to anything which both of them were not perfectly well aware that the other knew all about. Nor was there anything implied in the words which Leonora did not know to be quite true. Yet she was, to a certain degree, angry with the Gufone for saying them.

“If you don’t choose to believe that I am glad to see you, you need not believe it!” she said, with a toss of her head and shrug of her shoulders. “Perhaps you will be in a better humour when you have had your supper.”

“I am not out of humour, Signora Leonora. It *is* difficult to believe that anybody should be glad to see me! Why should anybody be? Perhaps, however, as you say, because you want to hear what you think I can tell you. What are the things, Signora Leonora, that you think I shall be able to tell you?”

“Nothing that I shall ask you, if you are cross with me!” said Leonora, who had not yet quite recovered her good humour.

“I am not cross with you, Signora Leonora. And the saints know that, if I was cross with all the rest of the world, I should never be cross with you. I think you ought to know that, Signora Leonora!

I will tell you all I can about anything you will ask me. And I have something, too, that I wish to tell you, when we can have a time to ourselves."

"Something to tell me!—about ——"

"About something that you have not got in your head! About somebody you never saw or heard of!" said the Gufone quickly, in reply to her last words.

Leonora felt grateful to him for seizing and responding to her thought without obliging her to complete the utterance of it, and forgave him his recent offence.

"Somebody I never saw or heard of! Oh! that will keep! It can be nothing that I shall care about hearing," she said. "Here comes mother; don't say——"

Gufone answered her by a look, which left it quite understood between them that nothing was to be said on the one subject on which he knew that she was anxious to hear him speak, save when they should be alone together.

"Why, Gufone, wherever have you been all this time?" said the gentle, somewhat drawling voice of the Signora Lucia on the stairs, as she came down into the living-room. "Sandro was so put

about by your not coming before ! he was obligated to go away again.” She came down as she spoke, and went to her place in her accustomed corner of the hearth. “Well ! here you are, any way, and in good time for supper ; and that’s well, for I dare say you are famished. Where have you been all this time ?”

“I was kept a bit longer in Rome, than I thought for. And then I have been four days coming from Rome here. I did not find anybody to give me a lift. And I don’t know how it is I have been so long about it. I kept along the road. I think I must be not well, altogether, signora. Long time as I have been about the journey, I don’t think that I ever was so tired before ! I delivered the letter as Signor Sandro told me.”

“Well, you shall have some supper, and get to bed, and stay as long as you like in the morning. There’s nothing special to be done that I know of, is there, *figlia mia* ?” said Lucia, addressing her daughter.

“No, I think not, mother. The Gufone may take his fill of rest to-morrow, if he likes.”

And then they went to supper ; and after that Signora Lucia did not seem as if she was going up

to bed at once, as she often did ; but, on the contrary, sent Gufone off to his as soon as the meal was over. So that there was no possibility of any talk between him and Leonora that night.

But the next morning, Nanni, despite his fatigue, and despite the permission he had received to prolong his morning sleep to any extent he pleased, was the first up of the little family ; and it was very little after sunrise that he left the house, and strolled up to the bench on the crag overlooking the sea.

Nor had he to wait long for Leonora. There had been no word of any agreement to meet there. But Nanni knew her habits, and was not disappointed.

"Good morning, signorina. I came here the first thing, in the hope of meeting you. I thought you would be sure to come out here. It will be an hour or more yet before the Signora Lucia is stirring," said Nanni.

"And I thought that you would come here," returned the girl, with a rather pale and pensive smile ; "that is," she added, "I thought so when I heard the latch of the house-door open this morning. But why did you get up so soon, Gufone, when you were so tired?"

“I could not sleep, signora. And, besides, I thought that you would be wanting to speak to me. But, Signora Leonora, I have very little to tell you of what you want to ask me. That day—the day you know that we started”—(“Yes,” thought Leonora. She knew the day, and was not likely to forget it on that side of the grave!)—“Signor Cesare and I went together as far as Civita Vecchia. And the next day—for Signor Cesare was too much tired to go any farther that night—we went on together as far as the last stage before reaching Rome, and there we parted. He was to go straight on to Rome, to go into the city like a Marchese; and I was to wait till nightfall, to go in like a Gufo, as was all right and natural; and that was the last I saw of Signor Cesare. But I know that he went first to the house of his parents, and to the Palazzo Casaloni on the next day.”

“But you did not see him again? Did he give you any message? All that way along the road what a long time for talking you must have had! Did you talk much together?”

“Yes, we talked, signorina. But I am not the sort of person one would talk much to of—of such talk as you are thinking of, signora. He told me’

at parting, to give you his dearest love, and to say that he should write on the morrow."

"But I have had no letter! In all these days I have had no letter!" said Leonora, the tears coming into her eyes as she spoke; "and I have been wanting so much, Gufone, to ask you about it—to ask what you think can be the reason."

"*Cosa volete che io sappia!* What can I say, signora? How can I tell? There are so many chances, so many things that may happen!" replied the Gufone, while the conviction became strong in his mind that it was as Lawyer Profondi had suggested, and that Cesare was proving himself the false and worthless light-o'-love that he, Nanni, had believed him to be. It made his heart ache to see the slowly-welling tears running down Leonora's melancholy face, and his dislike to Cesare grew into rancorous hatred, as he thought of him as the heartless worker of so much misery. Yet for all that, he could not help feeling, deep down in his heart, below the strata of his other feelings, as it were, a great joy and satisfaction at the thought that Cesare was thus throwing away the pearl that might have been his. It was a savage and fierce sort of joy, in nowise incompatible with the bitterest

resentment against Cesare for acting as he felt little doubt he was acting. He tried to conquer the feeling; he tried not to feel aught but sorrow for that which caused sorrow to Leonora. If it had been his to say at that moment, by his simple fiat, whether Cesare should prove true and make Leonora happy, or whether he should break her heart by proving false, it is to be believed that he would have let the word go forth for the ordaining of the first result, if he had knocked his head against the wall the next minute. He would have done this; and yet the man's nature was too strong within him, for him to prevent himself from being conscious of a savage satisfaction at the discovery of his rival's worthlessness.

Of course we all know that in acting, as it is above suggested that this poor devil would have acted, under the hypothesis supposed, he would have been guilty of conduct utterly unheroic and contemptible. One has not contemplated the heroic in the best examples held up to the modern world with such little profit and instruction. One knows nowadays that your real warranted lady-killing hero must be one who can love with such intensity of passion as to show that he loves himself best of all.

Whereas this poor Gufone really loved Leonora better than he loved himself—a great deal better; for being but a poor misshapen Gufone, and not a hero at all, or anything like one, he was not very much in love with himself. There *are* such poor devils in the world. But I would not have it supposed that I have fallen into the absurdity of making a hero out of my poor devil, Gufone.

“What things may happen, Gufone? That is what I wanted to ask you. I know so little of all the things that happen in the world away from our own home here. Tell me, what can have prevented Cesare from writing to me?” said Leonora, looking up coaxingly into the great, ugly, sympathising face.

“Well, letters may be written and sent, and never arrive, for the first thing. The post don’t always bring ’em. They lose ’em, or leave ’em behind, or one thing or other. You can’t trust to the post!” said the Gufone, with a sort of half-suppressed irritation in his manner.

“Oh, how cruel! how *cruel*! I should like to shoot the postman dead, if he has been leaving my letters behind, or losing them!” said the girl, clenching her fist, and with a flashing eye.



“Or sometimes people may be very busy, and not have time to write——”

Leonora turned her shoulder towards him with an angry movement of her head, and stamped her little foot on the ground, as the unwelcome suggestion fell on her ear.

“Or sometimes they may forget to write,” continued the Gufone, speaking slowly, and as if feeling his way.

But the result very quickly showed him that he had better not venture any further in *that* direction, as matters then showed themselves. She flashed round upon him with the quickness of lightning, and with a look that forced him, despite the conscious honesty of his heart, absolutely to quail beneath it, as she said, while with a strong effort she prevented herself from bursting into tears :—

“How dare you say so, you bad, base Gufone ! How dare you say that Cesare could forget to write to me ! Is it because that is just what you would do yourself—if anybody ever wished to hear from you ? ”

Nanni looked into her angry and working face in silence, and very sadly, for a minute, before he said—

"I wonder, Signora Leonora, whether there are any people crueller than the cruel postman you said just now you should like to shoot. I did not say that the Signor Cesare had forgotten to write to you. I cannot guess why no letter has reached you. But I wanted very much to speak to you about something else—something which will surprise you very much, and which, perhaps, I ought to have told you before; but that, somehow or other, it never came into my head to think of it."

"Something about Cesare?" asked she, quickly.

"No, signora; nothing about Signor Cesare—at least nothing about him directly, though it may concern him. It is about yourself, Signora Leonora."

"What can you mean, Gufone? You frighten me," said she.

"It is nothing to frighten you, signora; only to surprise you very much, and—to make everything very different to you. Don't be frightened, for there is nothing to be frightened about. Signora Leonora, the fact is, that the Signora Lucia is not your mother, nor the Signor Vallardi your father."

"Gufone! You are talking nonsense. I think that your head is not right this morning. What can you mean?"

Then Nanni told her at length the story of the journey to Rome which Vallardi and he and the Signora Lucia had made so many years ago, and how she had been brought to the lone house, that had been her home ever since, and how the Signora Lucia's own child had been sent away to the hospital, while everybody had been made to believe that the strange child from Rome had been sent away, and that she, Leonora, was the real daughter of Sandro and his wife.

"And you say that is nothing to be frightened at, Gufone!" said Leonora, with wide eyes, and speaking almost breathlessly, from the extremity of her astonishment.

"It is very surprising, signora; but there is nothing that need frighten you," said Gufone, gently.

"But why did they do it? Why did father and mother — no! they are not my father and mother any longer, you say! Then I have no father or mother? Oh, Gufone! nothing to be frightened at!" said Leonora, still too much under the influence of surprise to realise the whole of the strange fact told her so suddenly.

"No harm will come to you, signora! Nothing but good will come!"

And then the Gufone proceeded to explain, as well as his own ignorance, and the still greater ignorance of his hearer, permitted, how it came to pass that she had been abandoned by her parents, and who they were, and how it had also come to pass, that they were now anxious to get their daughter back again. He told her, further, how that he had heard that, by some means, which he could not guess, they had found where the child, which they supposed to be their child, had been sent, and had found the means of reclaiming her; how this other girl, the real daughter of Sandro and Lucia, was now in the home of her (Leonora's) parents, and was believed by them to be their child.

To all this Leonora listened with breathless astonishment and attention. But her excitement became much greater when Il Gufone lastly proceeded to let her know who those unknown parents of hers were, and when she was told the position and relationship in which Cesare stood towards them, and towards her.

“Then he is my cousin! The Marchese Cesare Casaloni is my cousin! Oh, Gufone! And he knows nothing of it! Nobody knows! Does nobody know but you, Gufone?”

“Of course Sandro Vallardi and the Signora Lucia know it. But they will not say it. We know that the Signora Lucia dare not say a word that her husband does not choose her to say.”

“Poor mother!—no, not my mother. But, oh, Gufone, how strange it all is!”

“And Signor Sandro,” continued the Gufone, quietly, “would most certainly kill me at once, if he knew that I had told you of this, signora. Not that I have kept the secret all this time for fear of him; but that it really has never come into my head to think of it.”

“But then how will he ever know it? How will Cesare ever know that I am his cousin?” said Leonora, impatiently.

“There is one other person who knows all the truth,” continued the Gufone, thoughtfully,—“the woman who carried the other child—Stella her name is—to the Innocenti at Florence. You know her, signorina. It is Signora Giuditta Fermi at Talamone.”

“Old Giuditta Fermi, who comes up to supper sometimes! And she knows all about it, too? She knows that I am the daughter of the Marchese Casaloni?”

“No, signorina! She don’t know whose daughter you are. But she knows that you are the child who was brought back from Rome; and that the child that was carried to the hospital was the child of Sandro and his wife. La Fermi knows all that; but she no more dare say a word than Signora Lucia. She is terribly afraid of Sandro. It would be very good,” added Nanni, after a long pause, during which he had kept his eyes fixed on the ground, while Leonora had been as intently eyeing him, waiting for the result of his thinking. “It would be very good,” he said slowly, and without looking up at his companion’s face, “that the Signor Cesare should know that you are his cousin; for, as I have been told, part of the property of the family belongs to him, and part to your father, the Marchese. And people say that it would be such a good thing for the two cousins to be married, so as not to divide the riches.”

“Do they say that?” replied Leonora; and a bright flush of pleasure rushed into her cheeks, and a smile lighted up her eyes with the tears still in them; “do they say that? Perhaps he is waiting to write till he can tell me that something is settled with his family.”

“But Signor Cesare does not know,—none of them know anything about your being the daughter of the Marchese, and his cousin!” said the Gufone, speaking slowly, and as if unwillingly, with his eyes still fixed on the ground.

“Ah! true!—that is true!” said the girl, with a little start; “I forgot that!”

“And they think that the other girl, Stella, Sandro Vallardi’s child, is the daughter of the Marchese, and Signor Cesare’s cousin!” said the Gufone, letting the words drop slowly, and, as it were, cautiously out of the mouth, while he watched Leonora furtively from under his great shaggy eyebrows.

It seemed to be a minute before she realised all that the words were calculated to suggest,—before the match which he had lighted communicated its spark to the gunpowder.

Then he saw a rush of deep, deep crimson, very different from the bright and pretty flush which had marked her pleasure a minute ago, — a hot burning glow spread in an instant over neck, and cheek, and brow, from the hem of her white bodice to the roots of her black hair, while a rapidly-spreading, rigid sort of immobility seemed to creep

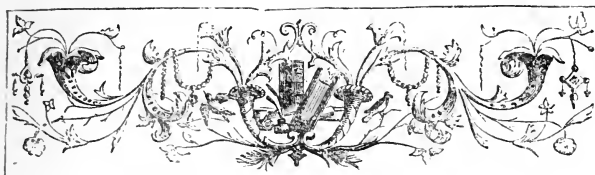
over her, as if she were, like the victim of the Divine wrath in the old classical fable, being turned to stone. Then, in the next minute, the hot red flush faded, and was succeeded by a livid, a deadly white.

All this the Gufone saw; and held his breath while he looked on it.

“Go away now, please, Gufone! I will come in presently by myself!” she said, after a while, in a very low voice, and with a kind of stiffness in her utterance, as if she spoke from jaws which had, like the rest of her, become rigid.

And Nanni obeyed, and slunk away, with dropping head and cautious step, as if he feared the noise made by his tread on the dry leaves.





## CHAPTER VI.

### GUFONE'S TEST.

GRADUALLY and slowly, when the Gufone was gone, life and the power of motion seemed to return to Leonora. Gradually the stony rigidity of her attitude as she stood was relaxed, and with a great, bosom-heaving sigh, but with dry eyes, she let herself fall rather than sat down on the bench on which she had so often sat with the false one in happier days. She sat, and tried to think.

And her thinking did avail to show her that despair was still premature, and to restore to her mind a certain amount of tranquillity.

For she reflected that all these facts which were known to her, and the general view and bearing of which upon each other had sufficed at the first blush of them to strike her to stone with a cold despair, were

in reality inconclusive. As these facts had first flashed upon her mind, a light like that of a blasting lightning flash had seemed to make clear the whole fell history of her lover's treachery. She saw it all in a moment. And that intuitive vision of the truth had seemed to leave no room for doubt.

But now the slower process of after-thought arraigned the precipitancy of such a conclusion.

What were the facts?

Cesare had, with reiterated assurances, promised her that he would write to her. And he had not done so. No! not even that was a proved fact. All that she knew was that no letter had reached her. The Gufone had reminded her how possible it was that letters written might never reach the person for whom they were intended. Then if he had in truth never written, other circumstances beside the want of will to do so might have prevented the possibility of his keeping his promise. Then it was said that he was to marry his cousin; and it was very clear that such a marriage was a thing very likely under the circumstances to be proposed, and to be considered highly expedient. And it might be considered almost certain that he had seen and been with this other girl, this impostor, and supposed

cousin. But the known facts were limited to these. Ought she not to consider that the very circumstance of the evident expediency of the match between Cesare and his cousin was sufficient to account for a report that such a marriage was to take place, without any other foundation for the story? Was it not likely that people would say that it was to be merely because it seemed so natural that it should be?

Gradually, as I have said, these reflections produced not ease nor happiness, but a certain degree of tranquillity in Leonora's mind, and enabled her to return to the house with all outward appearances of calmness.

The Gufone was absent when she entered on some of the various small duties of the household which devolved on him. And the Signora Lucia, little observant by reason of that shell of selfishness which the cicatrices of many heart-wounds during long years are apt to harden into, took no notice of any change in Leonora's usual bearing. The dull hours wore on in that dull house amid the trifling little duties, which were too small to occupy them, till a little before the time of the midday meal Il Gufone entered. He had watched unseen Leonora returning to the house. And his first object in coming in was

to note the expression of her face anxiously and carefully. But he dared not catch her eye. And his watchfulness was confined to furtive glances, which he trusted she would not observe.

Anybody but the crushed and quenched Signora Lucia would hardly have failed to observe that there was something between him and Leonora that was not according to the usual fashion of their ordinary intercourse.

The midday meal passed almost in silence. When it was over, and while she was moving about the room engaged in removing the simple apparatus of it, Leonora lifted her eyes suddenly and gave Nanni a look which told him to follow her to the door.

"Gufone," she said in a gentle voice, and with her eyes cast down on the ground, as he stepped outside the door after her into the bright spring sunshine, "Gufone *mio*, would you mind running down to the town for me to see if there are any letters? I have been so often. And I am ashamed to go again and again, and always for the same answer."

"I will go, signora. I don't think the post can have come from Orbetello yet," said the Gufone, with his eyes too on the ground, as if he was still

afraid of what their looks might say to each other if they met.

"It mostly comes very soon after one," she said.

"And maybe there may be a letter from yesterday's post," returned Nanni, only meaning to express his readiness to go at once in any case.

"Oh, no!" she said, with a little sad movement of the head and a half-suppressed sigh, "I have been there every day, Gufone *mio*. There was nothing for me yesterday."

Nanni raised his eyes for an instant to meet hers, and slowly and gravely shook his head with such an expression of infinite compassion and tenderness as his rude and ill-favoured features might have been thought incapable of figuring forth. Then dropping his head between his shoulders again, he said, "I will go at once, signora," and turned away to the path leading down the hill. In his own mind he had no doubt of Cesare's abandonment of her under the temptation of his new circumstances; and it was in his mind, almost unconsciously, to prepare her, as far as in him lay, for the truth, which he doubted not was about to come upon her.

And then, as he hurried down the hill, bent on doing his commission as quickly as might be,

that he might the sooner put an end to her suspense, his thoughts were turned into another channel.

Now it would be his to punish this false, heartless traitor! It would be for him, the poor despised Gufone, to turn the fellow out from his fancied greatness, from his wealth and his title. It was he, the poor outcast, who was the Marchese Casaloni! He it was who, according to the world's judgment, and to evident propriety and expediency, ought to marry his cousin, the daughter of the ex-prelate Marchese. Ah! And would this Cesare when thus turned out return to his first love? Would he wish to do so? Would he obtain forgiveness from Leonora for his unworthiness? Would her love be stronger than her sense of wrong, and the resentment of her maidenly pride, and her conviction—yes, try as she might to shut it out, the conviction—of her lover's unworthiness? Would the first love be stronger than all this? He ground his teeth with rage at the thought, and felt for an instant as if he could hate Leonora together with all her sex for evermore.

But then again would there be any opening and possibility for such a return? Would not Cesare in

all probability be married to this other supposed cousin before he could learn the deposition in store for him? He rejoiced at the thought. He could not help rejoicing that the Roman lawyer had judged it necessary so to act as to make this probable. He, Nanni, had, with simple uprightness of purpose, suggested that this marriage about to be made under a mistaken supposition should be prevented. But the lawyer had said that it could not be so; and now Nanni could not help being glad that this barrier should be placed for ever between his rival and Leonora. Was it cruel towards her to be glad of this? No, he answered to his conscience. No; it was not cruel. Would it not be worse for her, worse than any other misery, to be the married slave of such as he? Better for her that this should be rendered impossible.

And then the thought would come back that he would occupy the place of the person, who according to all the worldly exigences of the case ought to marry Leonora. Could there be no hope for him? Would it be impossible that when she should have seen that Cesare had never loved her with any such passion as deserved the name of love, when she should know that there was an irremovable barrier

between him and her, would it then be impossible that she should return his old, his true, and long-tried love? Would it be *impossible*? He thought of the picture the surface of the pool by the roadside had shown him, and let his head fall heavily on his breast with a groan, as his mind's eye recalled the presentment.

But when he should appear before her as the Marchese Casaloni, her cousin, the head of her family, the man who by all rights and for all sorts of reasons ought to be her husband? Ay! yes, buy her with his riches and his title! No! No!! No!!! That was not what he wanted; not what could heal all the wounds that had made one great sore of the poor outcast's heart.

And then came suddenly dashing into his mind, in the unaccountable way in which thoughts will come, the reflection that the marriage between Cesare and Stella might be as effectually prevented by the information that she, Stella, was not really the daughter of the Marchese Ercole, as by the information that he, Nanni Scocco, was in reality the true Marchese. Failing the one, the other fact might be known to the parties concerned in time to prevent this marriage. Should it be prevented in that way?



What should he do in this matter? What would Leonora wish him to do?

And that thought brought him to a decision. Leonora should be herself the judge. He would make her see and understand the matter as it stood. He would point out to her faithfully and without shrinking that she had it in her power to prevent this marriage—absolutely in her own power by making known the facts which he could enable her to establish. Yes; she might so claim, and recover and keep her lover if she were minded so to do. Doubtless, if she could have him on those terms the Signore Cesare would very graciously return to his allegiance. Yes, she should be made to understand that by only holding up her hand, as one might say, she might recall her faithless lover to her feet. Would she choose to do so? That was the question. The Gufone determined to put her to the test, half-feeling that if she decided to call her lover to her on these terms, and under these circumstances, he could be resigned to letting her have him, and justified in punishing both by the shortly-to-follow discovery of his own existence and claims.

Yes; this was what he would do. He would show Leonora how she could certainly recover, and have

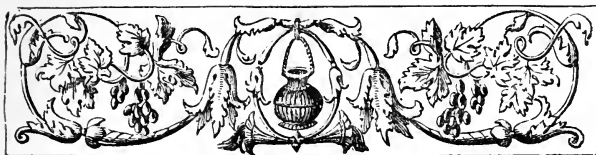
and hold her lover, if she chose to have him ; and he would lose no time in putting her to the test.

He hurried along at a quicker pace as he thus made up his mind, spurred on by his impatience to put his determination into practice. It would be a very good time when he got back again—without any letter, of course—there would be two or three hours before supper-time. The Signora Lucia was wont to pass those hours of the afternoon up-stairs in her own room. He would be able to speak at all necessary length with Leonora without fear of interruption. Nothing could be better.

He hurried to the post-office, and received the reply to his inquiry that he was prepared to receive.

No, there was no letter for the Signorina Valardi.

He hastened back, springing up the hill at a very different pace from that with which he had followed the road on his way from Rome ; and as he neared the house, saw Leonora on the look-out for him on the spot where she had stood to watch Cesare's and his departure for Rome.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE TEST APPLIED.

NANNI shook his head mournfully, and held up his empty hands, as he drew near Leonora, in token of the fruitlessness of his mission.

"There is no letter, signora!" he said sadly, as he reached the spot where she had been waiting for his return.

She sighed, and turned away her face for a moment. "It is only to-day as it has been all the other days," she said. "It may be that he cannot write; that he is ill, or that they have put him in prison, and will not let any letters come from him. Don't you think, Gufone, that that may be the reason why no letter has come for me?"

"What can I say, Signora Leonora? I do not think either of these things can be the reason. He

was quite well when we parted. I know that he was quite well in Rome on the following day. And as for his being put in prison, I do not see how it could have happened. His pardon had been granted."

"It is very, very hard to stay here from hour to hour, and from day to day, and to know nothing. I wish I could go to Rome! I wish I could go and find out the truth! Could not I go to Rome with you, Gufone?" she said, looking wistfully at him.

"You! Signorina! Go to Rome! What would the Signora Lucia say, let alone Sandro, when he comes home? How could you get there? You could not walk and sleep by the roadside as I do. And if you were at Rome, what would you be able to find out? The girl that they suppose to be the daughter of the Marchese is not at Rome," said the Gufone, seizing the opportunity of leading up to the point on which he wished to speak.

Leonora was silent for awhile, and then said in a sort of abstracted manner, "Where is she then? What did you tell me her name was? But what has she to do with it?"

"Stella, her name is, signora; and from what I heard I believe that she is at the villa of the Marchese in the country. Why I mentioned her was

because I supposed—I—I thought it likely, that is, that Signor Cesare might be there also! I think most likely he is not now in Rome.”

Nanni had said this much with fear and trembling, dreading to produce a more violent effect on his hearer's mind than he wished to do. But Leonora retained her quiet and abstracted manner, looking out over the far-off view with those inexpressive eyes, that seem either functionless for any outward purpose, or else appear to be seeking some object in the far distance.

“And the people say that probably he is going to be married to her,” she said, almost dreamily.

“People say so because she is his cousin—that is, they think so; and it seems so natural-like and convenient.”

“Gufone,” said Leonora, still calmly; but turning and looking fixedly into his face, “Gufone!” she repeated a second time, laying her hand on his arm as she spoke, “I must know this! I *must* know the truth! I believe that it is a false and wicked lie! I do believe so! But, Gufone, I must know!”

Nanni paused a minute before replying to her appeal. He was thinking, and the result of his

thought was the conviction that he could apply the test, to which he had determined to subject Leonora, to no good purpose until she should become convinced that it really was the fact that Cesare was deserting her for the purpose of marrying his cousin.

“You want to know what is the truth, Signora Leonora? I will find it out for you. You know that you can trust me. It would be very difficult, and most likely to no purpose, for you to go to Rome. I will go, not to Rome, but to the Villa Casaloni. If those that I expect to find there, are not there, I will go to Rome. And you may be certain, signora, that I will bring you back the truth.”

“You dear, good Gufone! Will you really go? I should be so thankful. Is it far, this villa? Where is it?”

“Not nearly so far as Rome. It is just on the far side of the Maremma, close under the tall, peaked mountain that one sees just under the sunrise, from the top of our hill here behind us. I can be there to-morrow.”

“Dear Gufone! Will you really do that for me?” said Leonora, looking at him with an ex-

pression in her large blue eyes that seemed to melt his heart within him, while it did not the less add to his despair.

“Ay, signora!” he said slowly, and almost bitterly; “I will do that for you. What is there that I would not do?” he added, after a pause, and speaking apparently rather to himself than to her.

“You are very good to me, Gufone,” she said, looking at him sadly. “You have always been very good to me. I wish—When do you think you can go away from here?”

“To-night I will go;—this evening. Signora Lucia will ask no questions. She will think I am going on some errand of Sandro’s. I will try to be back here on the day after to-morrow. But do not make sure of my coming. Maybe I shall not be able to find out what you want to know so quickly.”

“But how will you be able to go without any money, Gufone *mio*? You cannot get it from mother without telling her that you are going on business father sent you—that is, I mean that Signor Sandro sent you on. And I have no money—not so much as a *crazia*!”

“I have money, signora—more than enough;

enough to pay for a ride if I find any one going on the road!"

Thus it was settled between them, that Nanni should undertake this voyage of discovery. And he made up his mind to defer the application of his test until he should bring back the information of which he was in quest.

The result of his journey, or at least some of the results of it, we have already seen. He had little difficulty in ascertaining at Arcidosso that Lawyer Profondi had been right enough in his news. Nevertheless he added to the evidence of the fact the testimony of his own eyesight by watching Cesare and his new love, as we have seen, as they returned from their Montamiata excursion.

We know, also, how he employed one of the hours during which he had to wait for the opportunity of so seeing Cesare and Stella together. His visit to the garden of the villa had enabled him both to obtain the altogether conclusive evidence to the correctness of the report of the intended marriage from the Marchesa herself, and at the same time to ease his own conscience by giving her the warning he had so emphatically pronounced.



On quitting the garden, he had betaken himself to the spot where some of his old Arcidosso acquaintances had told him he might get a sight of the Signor Cesare and the newly-brought-home heiress, his proposed bride. Having so seen them, looking from out his covert at the lover with an eye that might have withered and blasted him, if ever human eye possessed such power of malison, the Gufone made the best of his way, putting out all his rare powers of activity and endurance on the occasion, back to Talamone, and the lone house on the hill above it.

He arrived on the morning of the day he had named at an earlier hour than either he or Leonora had expected. But she was at a window overlooking the door of the house, and had been there since sunrise. She waved a handkerchief to attract his attention as he came towards the door, and on his looking up, signed to him that she would come down to him.

"I will go to the bench on the crag and wait for you," he said, in a whisper, and went hurriedly towards the spot he had named. The fact was that he feared the telling of the news he brought; feared that Leonora might fall, or faint, or he knew not

what. He wished, in short, to have her further away from the house for the telling of it.

“Why did you make me run all the way here, Gufone? Why not tell me at once? One word! Is it true?”

“Sit here, signora,” he said, with a sort of short sternness. “Sit down here, and I will tell you.” He twisted his long fingers nervously one with the other as he spoke, and the simple words he had to say seemed to stick in his throat. He turned away from her for one moment before speaking, as she sat down at his bidding, rather startled at the strangeness of his manner, and then, having gathered all his forces of moral courage for the work in hand, he turned round quickly, and said,—

“What I said, Signora Leonora, was true. That man, Cesare Casaloni, is now engaged to be married to the girl Stella, whom he believes to be his cousin, for the sake of preventing the family property from being divided.”

She sat quite still on the bench, only gently, and, as if furtively, put out her hands on each side of her, as she sat, to grasp the plank on either side. And Nanni could see that the hands, convulsively

grasping the support they sought, were trembling. And she grew pale, not suddenly, but slowly and gradually, and gradually, too, a sort of stoniness seemed to come over her, and the light to die out from her eyes; but she sat still and silent. She did not fall, she did not cry out, she did not faint. After a while she said, in a very low voice, and slowly, as if utterance was difficult to her,—

“You *know* this is true?—no doubt?—no mistake?”

“It is certainly true, signora. I spoke with the Marchesa herself, the supposed mother of Stella; I saw him and her together. There is no doubt. The marriage is fixed to take place at the end of Carnival.”

For awhile, again—for many minutes—Leonora sat silent, rigid, and motionless. Then she said:

“So soon! You saw them together?”

“Yes, signora; they did not know that any one was watching them. I saw them.”

“Is she—is Stella very beautiful?”

“No; I think not. I should say not—not very. She is fair. I looked more at him than at her. What signifies whether she is beautiful or not? He is going to marry her because of the property!”

“Yes, because of the property,” said she; “and you spoke to the mother of—to the Marchesa—to my mother! How were you able to do that, Gufone?”

“I climbed the wall into the garden, when I knew she was there. She did not know who I was. I warned her not to let this marriage take place. I warned her that evil and sorrow would come of it.”

“What was the good of warning her not to let the marriage take place? Did you tell her that that girl was not her daughter,—that her daughter was far away among strangers?”

“I told her none of all that, signora; but, if you wish me to do so on your behalf, I will do so before the marriage has taken place.”

“Why before the marriage has taken place?” rejoined Leonora, in a dreamy, careless tone, though a furtive look into his face as she spoke indicated that there was a subcurrent of thought in her mind, which was the real subject of her own meditation, and which was being matured in the secrecy of her own thoughts, rather than intended to be discussed with her companion,—“why before the marriage has taken place?”

“Because then it would never take place, signora,” replied Nanni, in the tone of one who wishes his hearer to understand what he scarcely dares to express in plain words.

“And if it never did take place, what then?” returned Leonora, with a shrug and a look of intensely hopeless weariness.

“The Signore Cesare is to make this marriage, because it is thought good that he should marry his cousin,” said the Gufone in the same hesitating manner.

“Well, so you told me!” she said, with a little of irritation in her manner

“And if he finds out that somebody else is his cousin, he and all the others will wish that he should marry that other,” said Nanni in a low voice.

“Yes; then he would want to marry that other! And that other—would be me!” said Leonora, still in the manner of one dreamily thinking.

“Yes, as soon as the truth is known, that is what he and all the family would wish,” returned Nanni, looking at her askance, and watching her face secretly.

“In order to prevent the family property from being divided,” added Leonora in the same tone.

"So that it is in your power to prevent him from making this marriage, if you choose to do so?" said Nanni, who occupied himself while he spoke with making lines on the ground with the toe of his great shoe, and examining the effect produced by the operation.

"Yes; by letting them know what you have told me, I could prevent that marriage, I suppose."

"And don't think, signora, that I wish you to keep what I have told you secret," said Nanni. "In any case, as matters are now, I shall let the truth be known."

"You mean to let it be known?" repeated Leonora in the same dreamy, absent-seeming tone in which she had hitherto spoken.

"That is, if you do not do so now, or tell me to do it in your behalf, signora, I shall certainly do so—before long. I mean, signora, that *I* do not want you to keep the secret. If you wish to stop this marriage, you have only to speak the word."

"So as to make him wish to marry me, in order not to divide the family property?" Leonora said again in the same absent, musing tones.

"It is just that, Signora Leonora," said Nanni, looking up at her more boldly, and speaking in a

more decided manner. "You have but to speak the word,—you have but to say, 'Gufone, do this thing for me,' in order to see Signor Cesare back here at Talamone, at your feet, and entreating you to be his wife!"

"Ay, I understand it, Gufone *mio*!" said Leonora, drawing herself up to her full length, and raising her head, while she let her hands fall droopingly at her sides, and uttered one deep long-drawn sigh, as she spoke. "I understand!" she repeated, looking at him for the first time full in the face, and slowly nodding her head; "I understand. The thing that you propose to me——"

"No, signorina," interrupted Nanni, "I do not propose anything; I say what you might do."

"Very good," said Leonora impatiently; "the thing I might do is to proclaim myself the daughter of the Marchese Casaloni, and then use that position to bribe my—to bribe Signor Cesare Casaloni to honour me with his—his love, and his hand. It is very plain. Well, now I am—now, at all events—only a poor girl, brought up here in this Maremma—chiefly brought up by you, Gufone, I think; and I tell you," she went on, as a fierce light came into her eyes, and a strange sternness into her voice,—“I

tell you that, even though I were broken-hearted, even though life had been made impossible to me by—by what has happened, I would rather lay me down here and die—ay, worse by far than that—I would rather go on through all the years of life with the pain at my heart that there is there now, than buy—ah! than do as you have said. Let the man——”

She stopped short, and, seeming to quell herself by an effort that sent a tremour through every fibre of her body, added quietly, “No! I think, if you please, Gufone, that you shall *not* do that thing for me.”

There came a bright light into Nanni’s eyes, and he returned the look of her face raised to his with an expression before which her eyes were suddenly dropped to the ground, as he said—

“You will not, by speaking this word, call back the Marchese Cesare to your side, and hear him again tell you of his love!”

There was a pause of a minute or so—to Nanni it seemed interminable—during which, one skilled to read such writing might have read in the working features of Leonora’s face, and in the expression of her eyes—raised, not this time to her companion’s



face, but to the cloudless blue vault above her—not indecision, but all the intense suffering which her answer cost her as she replied—

“I will not speak that word!”

“*Sia dunque cosi!* So then let it be!” cried Nanni, in a voice in which it was impossible not to detect a note of triumph. “*Sia cosi!* Let the false, base traitor——”

“Gufone!” cried the girl in a voice that stopped him in his utterance as suddenly as a thunder-stroke could have done,—“Gufone, I will not hear it! Go away! You speak of what you know nothing about! Go away, and leave me to think in quiet! Go away, I say!”

And the poor Gufone obeyed, and slunk away to the house, leaving Leonora to the communing with her secret thoughts, which she had insisted on.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### IL DOTTORE PROFONDI AGAIN.

THE nature of the thoughts to which Leonora desired to be left, scarcely needs to be set forth or explained to any reader. But Nanni had his meditations too, as he went about the afternoon duties, which had been postponed to his interview with Leonora. And it is more necessary for the narrating of the events which followed that these should be recorded.

So then Leonora decidedly enough refused to recall the lover who had been faithless to his love, by showing him that it was his interest to be true to her. Good so far! And the marriage then between him and Stella would take place! It was to be supposed so. There seemed little chance to judge from the manner in which his warning had been received by the Marchesa Elena, that any attention would be

paid to it. Doubtless the Marchese Cesare and his supposed cousin Stella Vallardi would be married at the time that had been fixed. He, Nanni, had discharged his conscience by giving them the warning he had spoken. Let them be married! The upshot would be a fitting, though insufficient, punishment to Cesare for his heartless and cruel conduct!

But it was decidedly Nanni's intention, as he had intimated to Leonora, that in any case the truth should be known respecting her birth. He was fully determined that her cousinship to himself should become a known and recognised fact. He had told her truly enough that no fear of Vallardi would deter him from disclosing the secret of her identity. It was true probably that no such fear would have kept him silent now that the matter was brought prominently before his mind, and that the desire of her parents to recover their child rendered it possible that right should be done, even if he had still supposed himself but the outcast run-away son of he knew not whom, and grandson of the sacristan at Arcidosso. For even as a boy, resentment and the spirit of rebellion had always followed any attempt of Sandro's to press too hardly on him. But it may be supposed that the information as to his own real

status and position, which had recently reached him, had the effect of making him still more indifferent to his violent patron's anger. He was quite determined to take the necessary steps for making known the real parentage of Leonora as soon as the marriage between Stella and Cesare should have made it impossible for him to tempt Leonora with a renewal of his former protestations.

But when he began to consider what was the nature of the steps to be so taken, he became aware of a very serious difficulty. He would disclose the secret of Leonora's birth,—the secret, that is, of the substitution of his own child, by Vallardi, for the stranger child, when the latter was supposed to be sent to the hospital. Yes! But who would believe his statement? It would be necessary to give proof of it. All the parties would be interested in disbelieving his story. Of course his simple assertion would not be sufficient to cause such a tale to be accepted. What proof of the truth of it could be given? The only human beings who knew the truth and could testify to it were himself, Vallardi, the Signora Lucia, and Giuditta Fermi. Of course it was out of the question to expect any assistance in proving what he was bent on proving from either

Vallardi or his wife. Giuditta Fermi! Yes! There was Giuditta Fermi! That was the only chance. And was that any chance at all?

Would it be possible to induce Giuditta to tell what she knew on the subject? Nanni was inclined to think that it would not be possible. He knew the dreadful fear in which the poor woman stood of Vallardi. He knew that the menaces which had frightened her half out of her wits at the time when she took the child to the foundling hospital were still, after more than three lustres, as fresh in her mind as ever. In short he felt that it would be vain to hope that she could be persuaded to come voluntarily forward to tell the story of that journey to Florence, and the circumstances of it.

And if she would not do so, how was the strange story to be so brought to light, that anybody would give any credence to it?

In this difficulty, Nanni came to the conclusion that the only thing to be done was to consult his new friend the lawyer, Dr. Anastasio Profondi. It was drawing near the time at which the lawyer would probably be expecting to see him again. He would make another journey to Rome without further delay! Dr. Profondi would doubtless listen

to his story, knowing him to be in reality the Marchese Casaloni, though nobody else would. Dr. Anastasio Profondi would listen to him with attention, and doubtless also would know what was best to be done under the circumstances of the case.

So that evening after supper Il Gufone told Signora Lucia and Leonora that he should have to go to Rome again, and that he intended to start on the following morning. He did not say anything more to either of them as to the object of his journey. And neither of them asked any explanation of it, Lucia from her habitual state of repression, and confirmed habit of never meddling with the affairs of her husband, as she supposed this journey to be; and Leonora because her mind was too fully occupied with her own thoughts.

The Gufone started before daybreak; and the lawyer's *scudi* enabled him to make the journey in less time than it would have otherwise taken him. He reached Rome early the following morning, and had no difficulty in finding Dr. Profondi.

The lawyer told him that all was progressing well; that he anticipated no difficulty; that his proofs were nearly all ready; and that he fully expected to see his client recognised as the legiti-

mate head of the house of Casaloni in less than a month from that time.

“And now, Signor Dottore,” said Nanni, “I want you to let me speak to you about another subject. It is a queer thing, isn’t it, that a poor devil like me should all of a sudden have two affairs to talk to a lawyer about?”

“Well, Signore Marchese,” said the lawyer with a smile, “if the poor devils don’t often want to talk to us lawyers, it often enough happens that we want to talk to them, you know. Ha! ha! But I am chattering instead of listening to your lordship, which is what I ought to do. What is the nature of the matter you speak of?”

“Well, Signor Dottore, I will tell it as short as I can. When I ran away from my grandfather, now nearly twenty years ago, I fell in, no matter now how it was, with one Sandro Vallardi, who lives in the Tuscan Maremma, near Talamone: and I have been with him ever since. Now about sixteen or seventeen years ago he took me with him and with his wife to Rome. And there we three received secretly from the hands of a young priest, I believe he was, a little baby, which Signora Vallardi, who had a baby of her own of the same age, carried back

to Talamone. Vallardi did not know who it was that paid him for taking this child, and he told me to remain behind, while he returned with his wife and the child to the Maremma, to find out who the person was. And by following the young priest secretly I found out that the baby, a little girl, was the child of Monsignore Casaloni, and the Contessa Elena Terrarossa."

"The child whom they have now reclaimed, and who is to be married in a day or two to the Signor Cesare?" interrupted the lawyer. "But what a very extraordinary chance that you of all people in the world should have been concerned in the making away with her in the first instance! Really quite a wonderful coincidence!"

"Yes, Signor Dottore! but that is not all! That is only half the story. And it is about the latter half that I want to speak to you. The Signora Vallardi, as I told you, had a baby of her own of the same age or thereabouts as the child of the Monsignore. And the intention of Sandro Vallardi was, I believe, that his wife should nurse the two children if she was able to do so. He promised her that if she was not able to do so the strange child should be sent to the Innocenti Hospital at Florence."



“Yes! and that was eventually done,” said the lawyer.

“*Scusi*, Signor Dottore! That was *not* done. Signora Vallardi was unable to nurse the two children. She is not a strong woman. But from some motive which I do not know, Sandro Vallardi changed his mind, and forced his wife, much against her will, to send her own child to the Innocenti, and to keep the child from Rome as her own.”

“God bless me!” cried the lawyer quickly; “this is very important indeed! Then in fact the girl, who is now supposed to be the daughter of the Marchese Ercole, is not his daughter at all, but the child of this Vallardi.”

“Just that, Signor Dottore!” said Nanni, nodding at the lawyer.

“And what has become of the other child, the real daughter of the Marchese and of the Contessa Elena?” asked the lawyer, with the eagerness of a well-trained pointer who catches the scent of game.

“She has always lived with Vallardi and his wife in the Maremma, and has always believed herself to be their daughter till the other day, when I told her the truth.”

“Dear me! Ha! Hum! Humph! God bless

my soul ! And pray, Signore Marchese, what—I mean what sort of a young lady is this—person you speak of ? ”

“ The Signorina Leonora, that is her name, is as beautiful a girl as you ever saw, Signor Dottore ; and not half so beautiful as she is good,” responded Nanni, with a scarlet flush in his face.

“ Ha ! Hum ! Humph ! ” said the lawyer, looking sharply at his client. “ And the Signorina Leonora, you tell me, knows the fact of her own parentage ? ”

“ *Si*, Signor Dottore ! since a few days ago she knows it ; since I told her of it. And it is now her intention to claim her proper position.”

“ *Eh gia !* claim her position ! *Piano, Piano !* Signore Marchese ! *Chi va piano, va sano !* Claim her position is easily said ! But how is she to prove the truth of what she asserts, or, excuse me, of what you assert for her ? Proofs, my dear Signore Marchese, are necessary in these matters ! ”

“ That is just what I thought, Signor Dottore ; and that is what I have come to you for.”

“ *Bravo ! va bene ! va bene !* ” returned the lawyer, rubbing his hands briskly : “ let us see, then, what proofs are available on the face of the matter. To

begin with, what persons were cognisant at the time of this substitution of one child for the other?"

"Four persons, and no more, Signor Dottore—Sandro Vallardi and his wife, I myself, and a woman now living at Talamone, named Giuditta Fermi."

"Come, come! this already looks promising. You can testify to the facts of the substitution yourself? Knew both the children, eh, Signore Marchese?"

"As well as I know myself from you, Signor Dottore. I was half-nurse, I may say, to the Signora Lucia's child, before we went to Rome to bring home the other; and I and the woman Giuditta Fermi carried the other child to Florence together. One child was fair, and the other dark—the Vallardis' child fair, the Roman child dark."

"Couldn't be better testimony than that. As for the Vallardis—the parents—I suppose that small help in proving the truth is to be expected from them. Now, as to the fourth witness. What about this Signora Fermi, Signore Marchese? Was she equally well acquainted with the two children and the appearance of them?"

"Perfectly so, Signor Dottore. She had nursed the child of Lucia Vallardi, and knew it as well as

its mother did. She knew that she was carrying that child and not the stranger child from Rome to the hospital at Florence."

"And she is ready to testify to that effect?"

"There is the difficulty, Signor Dottore. I doubt whether anybody could persuade old Giuditta Fermi to say what she knows about it. She is in such mortal fear of Signor Sandro Vallardi. He is a hard man to deal with is Sandro Vallardi, and a masterful! And—in short my belief is, that poor old Giuditta is too much afraid of him to speak what she knows for any consideration."

"Ha!—hum!—humph!" said Dr. Profondi, musingly. I see—I see! But I suppose," he added, after a pause for consideration, "I suppose that she might easily be led to speak of the facts to any one of the other persons who were cognisant of them—to yourself, for example?"

"Oh, yes. She would speak to me about it easily enough, Signor Dottore; but what would be the use of her speaking to me?" said Nanni, with a very contemptuous emphasis on the last word.

"Very little use, indeed, Signore Marchese, if no ears but yours heard her. But suppose some other ears chanced to be within hearing, and suppose

those ears grew on a head which had some brains in it, and belonged to somebody who would be a good and competent witness to the fact that the signora—whatever her name is—uttered such and such statements, and made such and such admissions. Don't you see, Signore Marchese?"

Nanni contented himself with nodding two or three times very appreciatively for all answer.

"Well, then," continued Profondi, "all that is needed is to arrange such a conjunction of circumstances. Do you think you could manage that?"

Nanni, after a careful but short review of the small roll of all those whom he could call acquaintances at Talamone, avowed that he was afraid he could not find anybody adapted to the business in hand. As to the mere arrangement of the possibilities for such a scheme, he did not think there would be any difficulty. Old Giuditta, he said, often strolled out along the beach—*per pigliare il fresco la sera*; and there were some old fishing-boats, half-rotten, lying on the sand. Nothing would be easier than for anybody to get into one of these, where he could lie completely hidden, while the old woman could be induced to sit down on the shore under the shelter of it, and then led

to speak of the facts her evidence was needed to prove.

And the upshot of the conversation between Nanni—or the Marchese Giovanni Casaloni, as the lawyer persisted in calling him—and Dr. Profondi was, that it was arranged between them that the ears growing on to a head with brains in it, which were needed, should be the ears of the lawyer himself.

“Ah! when one wants a thing well done,” he said, “there is nothing like doing it oneself. I will manage to go back with you to Talamone. We will arrive there after dark, and on foot, to make all safe. We will get some conveyance at Orbetello, which shall take us within a mile or so of the place, and then be sent back. We will get into the place in the dark; you shall show me the boat you speak of. We will arrange on the exact place to which your witness shall be brought, and leave the rest to me.”

And that same night the lawyer and his client were on their way in the diligence to Civita Vecchia.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SIGNORA GIUDITTA IS CIRCUMVENTED.

DR. ANASTASIO PROFONDI's plan was carried out very exactly in accordance with the programme he had laid down, as plans formed by him usually were. He and his client quietly walked into Talamone along the coast after dark on the next night to that on which they had left Rome; and Nanni pointed out the boats he had spoken of. They selected one, which lay with its keel towards the sea, just behind that same big mass of cut stone embedded in the sand, which was described in an early chapter of this narrative, on the spot where Lucia and her friend Giuditta sat and talked, now near twenty years ago, respecting the projected journey of the former to Rome. There was the stone to sit on! Old Giuditta still, as in old times, often sat there

of an evening. It would be the easiest thing in the world to manage that she should do so on the following evening.

Having made this arrangement, the lawyer and his client separated, the former being, at his own desire, left to his own devices; and the latter climbing the hill to his home, after receiving a parting caution from his companion not to attempt to see or hold any further communication with him during the hours which were to elapse before the execution of their plan.

He got to his sleeping-room without waking either of the inmates of the house, who had already gone to bed when he reached the house. And the next morning he said nothing to Leonora of the object or results of his journey. It seemed to him that she rather sought to avoid any *tête-a-tête* meeting with him during that day. When they were together for a few minutes after the mid-day meal, when Lucia had gone up-stairs, and before Leonora had escaped by following her, Nanni had ventured to say, without raising his eyes to her face as he spoke—

“You are still minded, Signora Leonora, to say no word which may prevent the marriage between your cousin and Stella Vallardi?”



“Gufone, why do you make me think of that again?” she said, while her face flushed, an angry light came into her large dark eyes, and her transparent nostrils were distended with anger. “Did I not say enough? I tell you that I would rather die—che! that is a small matter!—I would rather see the man you say I might call back lying dead here before me, than say the word you speak of. What! bribe a man——”

She broke off with a gesture of most eloquent disdain; and, rushing to the foot of the stairs, bounded up them, and shut herself in her little chamber, to throw herself on the bed in a passion of tears. And Nanni saw her no more before—about the hour of the Ave Maria—he went down to Talamone on the errand the reader wots of.

The Gufone strolled to the little shop—if such it could be called—in which the Signora Giuditta lived and carried on her business; and found no difficulty in joining himself to her in her evening stroll. What Tuscan ever declined or avoided an opportunity of chat? Nor was it more difficult to cause the simple-minded old soul to sit just where it was wished that she should sit, or to lead the conversation in the desired direction.

"I declare, Signora Giuditta, the Signorina Leonora grows handsomer and handsomer every day. Did you ever see a prettier girl?" began Nanni, as he and his companion sat themselves down on the big stone, under the lee of the boat.

"She is, Gufone, a very pretty girl, and a good girl too, as far as I can see. There is no denying that. But I often think of the little white face and curly yellow hair of the other one."

"What, Signora Lucia's child; the one we carried—you and I, Signora Giuditta—to the Innocenti, nigh upon twenty years ago now!" said Nanni, quite surprised at the readiness with which the old woman's talk ran in the direction he wished it to take. It was not strange, however, that it should do so; for the absolute silence which the poor woman had been forced to keep towards the world in general for so many years on a subject which had naturally often been in her thoughts, made it a solace to her to speak on it to the few persons, and on the rare occasions, on which it was permitted to her to do so.

"Ah! bless the little heart of it! I often think that I would go a long way to have a look at that child once again. This girl here, the Signorina

Leonora, is a pretty girl enough, as you say, Gufone; but I could never take to her as I did to the other one. I remember when they were both babies, this Roman girl was like a blackamoor by the side of Signora Lucia's own child."

"Ah! there was not much chance of anybody not knowing which was which that had ever seen the two," said Nanni, with a masterly diplomacy that caused the lawyer to form a much higher conception of his client's intelligence than he had hitherto done. "If more of the neighbours," continued he, "if anybody had seen the two children besides you and me, Signora Giuditta, Sandro could never have managed to change one for the other the way he did."

"That's what I have often thought, Gufone. But, bless you, I am a'most afraid to think about it at all, only I can't help it sometimes—let alone speaking of it. But now 'tis so long ago that there'll never be any more heard about it."

"Ah, Signora Giuditta, it is an old tale now! Could you ever guess what Sandro's game was in making poor Signora Lucia send away her own child to the hospital and keeping the Signorina Leonora and passing her off as his child?"

“Who—I? *Santa Madonna!* What should I know or guess about it? I wouldn’t so much as think what he was up to for all the world.”

“And in all these years you never spoke a syllable about the matter to any living soul—eh, Signora Giuditta?”

“What; Signor Sandro has been setting you on to find out, I suppose? Well, Gufone, you may swear that I have never so much as looked as if I knew anything about it. He doesn’t think I have, I hope; does he?”

“Not a bit of it. Lord bless you, he has never spoken a word about it—not to me, anyway—for years past. No; that is not it. I was only saying what came uppermost in my own mind, Signora Giuditta.”

“Say anything!” replied la Giuditta, somewhat reassured; “I should think not, indeed! I never was so frightened in my life as I was that evening when Signor Sandro made me walk up the hill with him, the night before we set off for Florence! To hear the way he went on about what he would do to me if ever I spoke a word to any soul living about the change of the one child for the other! It was enough to make your blood run cold. And I tell

you my blood has run cold many a night as I lay and thought of it. Say a word! No; I have never said a word, and am not likely to. *Madre di Dio!* What is that?" cried the old woman, jumping up as alertly as if the twenty years, or near it, since last we saw her sitting on that same stone had done nothing to stiffen her joints; and facing round towards the boat behind her; "What is that? There was something moving in the boat!"

"Only the rats, perhaps," said the Gufone; "you may swear there are plenty of them in the rotten old wood."

He got up, however, as she spoke, and prepared to leave the spot with his companion, for he judged that the purpose for which he had brought her thither had been fully accomplished; but such was not the intention of Signor Anastasio Profondi. His experience taught him the importance of securing the evidence of an unwilling witness, while it was, as it were, fresh in the mouth. It would be much more possible, as he was well aware, for the Signora Giuditta to deny all she had said when a few days, or even a few hours, should have passed, than it would be for her to do so on the spot; so he decided

on coming out from his hiding-place, and completing his business at once.

Thus it came to pass that, as Giuditta, startled and alarmed, and Nanni—knowing well enough what had been the cause of the noise that had frightened the old woman, but not feeling at all sure that the lawyer meant then to discover himself—stood looking at the old boat turned over on its side, with its keel towards them, they saw first a low-crowned black hat, and then a white face, white neckcloth, and then half of the remainder of a black figure rise above the uppermost gunwale of the boat.

Signora Giuditta, with a sharp scream, turned to run away; but Nanni, catching her by the arm, detained her, and strove to reassure her.

“There is nothing to be afraid of, Signora Giuditta; nothing at all. Nobody shall hurt you. This gentleman is a friend of mine.”

“Not the slightest intention to be unpolite,” said the lawyer in an insinuating tone, and with a bow, as he came round from behind the boat so as to place himself between Signora Giuditta and the little town towards which she had manifested the intention of running. “No wish to intrude or

annoy, I assure you, Signora Fermi. I have the pleasure of knowing this gentleman, as he has told you. Signora Giuditta Fermi, I believe?"

"Sì, signore, that is my name. I don't know how you come to have heard of it. You frightened me, that is the truth, coming behind one in that way."

"I am sorry, signora, to have frightened you; but I did not come behind you—it was you who came in front of me. Ha, ha! I was in the boat here before you came to sit down," said the lawyer.

"*Santa Madonna!* In the boat? Gufone, the gentleman says he was in the boat before we came here!" said Giuditta, manifesting very evident signs of uneasiness.

"Well, it was not a very comfortable place, certainly," returned the lawyer; "but pray don't mention it. What does it matter that I was in the old boat all the time that you and my friend here were talking?"

"Only that sometimes folk might not wish to have their talk overheard by them that, mayhap, it was not intended for," said Giuditta; "but I suppose, for that matter, your lordship did not hear what we were saying?"

“Well, signora, to be frank with you, I did hear every word you said; and, what is more, I noted it all down in this little book as you said it. But don’t be alarmed. No harm will come of it.”

“*O, Dio mio! Ah, Misericordia!* What will become of me? Signor Sandro will be the death of me! But you know I did not mean it. Nanni, you know I never meant to say a word to mortal man,” said the poor woman, in an agony of distress and terror.

“My dear Signora Fermi, no harm shall happen to you,” said the lawyer slowly and emphatically, “no harm shall happen to you. *Anzi!* It shall be to your advantage. You shall find your profit in the testimony you have given. Depend upon it, we shall be able to protect you from Signor Sandro. You shall come and live in Rome, and be taken good care of, if it comes to that. Nobody shall hurt a hair of your head. Come now, Signora Giuditta, come and sit down with me here on this stone, and we will talk it all over together. Depend upon it, you shall be taken care of, and shall profit by this business. There is only one way in which any harm could come to you, and that would be by your attempting to deny any of the facts you



stated just now. Then, indeed, the law and the *Sbirri* would be down upon you; but I don't think that you are either such a knave or such a fool as to do that; you don't look like it. Come, now, let us sit down and talk it over together. Will you take a pinch of my Roman?" said Profondi, offering his box.

Thus exhorted and reassured, old Giuditta did sit down again on the stone; and, before long, the lawyer had succeeded in getting her to sign her name in pencil in his little note-book to a succinct statement, embodying all the facts of the substitution of the one child for the other, and the deposit of Stella Vallardi in the Hospital of the Innocenti at Florence.

The stars and the moon rising above the Monte Argentario had afforded light enough for the transaction of this little bit of business, although the short southern twilight had faded into night before it had been concluded. The lawyer politely proposed to walk back to the town with the Signora Giuditta; but the old woman, probably with the fear of Sandro still before her eyes, did not wish to be seen by the townsfolk in the company of an unknown gentleman, who had very much the

appearance of a lawyer, and said that she would rather walk home by herself.

“Of course, there is no chance of her slipping through our fingers, Signore Marchese,” said the lawyer, as soon as the old woman had turned her back; “there is no doubt of your being able to find her when we want her, I suppose?”

“Just as sure as of finding Monte Argentario whenever you choose to look for it, Signor Dottore,” returned the Gufone; “and now you see that I was right enough in my story.”

“There was no doubt of that before, Signore Marchese,” said the lawyer, with a bow; “but now we have got the necessary evidence. I was very right to come down here myself. Now the young lady in whose behalf you have been acting may make her claim as soon as she likes. I will just prepare a rather more formal statement of the facts to which the old lady can give evidence, and get her to put her name to it to-morrow morning before I set off for Rome.”

“I don’t suppose that she will make any more difficulty about it now,” said Nanni.

“Difficulty! Not she. How can she? Don’t you see, my dear sir, that we have got the whip

hand of her, dear old lady? However much she may be afraid of this Sandro, we can beat that fear with a bigger fear. If she was to make any difficulty now, I should say, 'Well then, signora, I must go to Signor Vallardi himself about it, and tell him of the statements I have got under your hand in my note-book.' Don't you see? Oh, no! She will give no trouble."

"And you think, Signor Dottore, that the Signorina Leonora will be able now to make her claim to her birthright in such a manner as to be listened to?"

"Not a doubt of it. It is a clear case. There is no doubt about it. As soon as I get back to Rome, with this old lady's formal testimony in my pocket, I shall write a letter to the Marchese Ercole. By-the-bye, Signore Marchese, you might as well also let me have your statement of your evidence in writing."

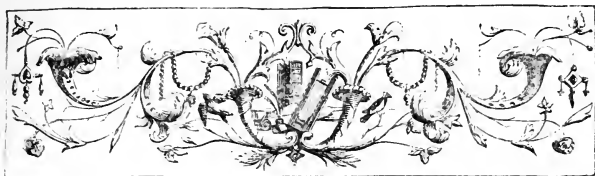
"You return to Rome to-morrow morning?" asked Nanni.

"Yes, Signore Marchese; first thing in the morning, if you have no further need of my services here. I hope to be in Rome by the morning after," replied Profondi.

“Well, if you will send me a paper drawn up like the one for old Giuditta I will sign it and send it to you. I can testify to all she can. It all was done under my own eyes. But,” added Nanni, after some consideration, “please, Signor Dottore, don’t write to the Marchese till I write to you or come to you to ask you to do so: I shall do so in a few days.”

And so “the Marchese” and his lawyer parted; and the former proceeded to climb the hill, looking out for the lights from the windows of Sandro Vallardi’s house high on the mountain-side above him, and mainly occupied with the thought whether he should see Leonora when he got home, or whether she would have already gone to bed.

There was no light to be seen. The two women had gone to bed as the fowls go! The Gufone crept to his chamber, as he had often before done, without waking anybody; and Leonora heard nothing of the step that had been made in her fate till the following morning.



## BOOK V.

"WHERE THE WICKED CEASE FROM TROUBLING,  
AND THE WEARY ARE AT REST."

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### CHAPTER I.

SANDRO AT HOME.

THE last days of the Carnival were at hand, and all Italy was busy at the hard work of pleasure, which it is deemed necessary to get through during the hundred or so of hours that immediately precede the lenten season of sackcloth and ashes, penitence and fasting—the "sermons and soda-water the day after," which Byron considered, as he has told us, the natural sequel to a period of festivity and "mirth and laughter!" All the customs and social traditions of the Italians seem designed to make the

shock of the change and the revulsion as violent as possible. Madder and madder, faster and more furious grows the revel, with a marked crescendo movement till midnight—or perhaps by sufferance till two hours later—on the night preceding Ash Wednesday. Then suddenly the lights are put out, the masks, the false noses, the dominoes, the disguises are laid aside! The fun is over! The worn-out, satiated revellers get them away to their homes, the streets are restored to quiet, and the Church begins *its* high-time of activity and power. And many of those who have been most unrestrained in the enjoyment of their Carnival—especially among the sex most open to sacerdotal influence—rush with equally unbridled violence into all the recognised practices of ascetic devotion—even to the extent, in many cases, of retiring for the whole duration of Lent to strictly monastic retirement!

At least all this was the case some two or three lustres since in Italy. Carnival rioting and lenten observances are both on the wane. Is it that these children of the south are at last ceasing to be altogether children? Will some Italian Laud, shrewdly understanding the intimate connection between false noses or pink calico dominoes, and unquestioning

subjection to the powers that be in Church and State—a secret which the old Medici, with the magnificent and Platonic Lorenzo at the head of them, so well understood—will the day come, I say, when some Italian Laud will preach due observance of carnival revels to unwilling ears, inclining rather to discussion of the foundation of authority in Church and State, and preach as much in vain as our archbishop preached in favour of May-poles and dances on the green?

It seems not unlikely; for the rivers will run towards the sea! And the “roll of ages,” which our Laureate hears, is, even in lotus-eating Italy, making itself heard above the diminishing din of Carnival revelling.

In the days of which I am writing, however—the good old days of many a man now in middle life in Italy, the days before a stranger filled the Grand Duke’s throne—the Carnival was a Carnival. But all this was, as so very much else in Italy, mainly for the cities. To the morne Maremma Carnival-tide made little difference. In a district so given back by man to Nature’s own devices, the alternations of rain and sunshine, and the circling of the zodiac, were of more pressing interest than

the successions of the Church's calendar. To the sparse inhabitants of that melancholy region the Carnival-time made little difference, and to the inhabitants of the lone house on the promontory above Talamone, none at all.

Yet the time was watched, and the last great final day of the revel-time anxiously expected by one of the inmates of the little family. Leonora had been told by the Gufone that the marriage between Cesare and Stella Vallardi, personating his cousin, was to take place before the end of Carnival. He had mentioned that fact once cursorily only, and had not repeated it; and Leonora had asked no questions. But the date named had branded itself on her mind in an instant, and needed no repetition. And she waited with a sort of feverish eagerness, mixed with dread and horror, for the day on which that deed was to be irrevocably done.

Her condition during those days was a very piteous one. It seemed to her that it would be more possible for her to possess her soul in peace when she should have heard that all was over, that the deed was done, and that there was nothing more in this life for her to look to, or care for, or think about!—for it came to that with her. She was,



above all other types of girlhood, exactly that in which such a blow as that which she had received would seemingly be final—fatal! The utter seclusion of her life had stored up all the energies of a deeply passionate nature for the overwhelmingly strong development of them on the one great occasion that had called them forth. If she had ever even chattered of love with other girls—if she had discounted any of its emotions by imagination fed with the words of poet or romancer, the very self-consciousness, which would have been thus produced when “falling in love” happened to her, would have tended to modify the violence of the passion that worked in her. Unknown and uncomprehended—unresisted, therefore, and unguarded against—the great storm-wind of first-love blew over her in its mighty force, and became the absolute and sole master of heart, and soul, and life, and thought. If she had known, as other girls know, the ascertained fact, that love has ere now been betrayed, and the betrayed one has, nevertheless, lived to love again, and to be happy in that love,—if thus much of the annals of humanity had been known to her, it might have whispered to her that that which had happened to others might—*might* possibly, at some far

future day, occur to her. But no such tales of other shipwrecks, and of final escape from them, had ever reached her. No such possibilities seemed possible to her. It seemed to her quite natural, necessary, and indubitable, that when this monstrous thing had happened to her, all in this world was over for her.

Yet she had, as yet at least, acquired none of the tranquillity of despair. Her whole soul and body was in a state of fever,—feverish anxiety and restless waiting. It was not that she had any doubt of the certainty and accuracy of the tidings that had been brought her. Was it that she had any doubt of the constancy of her own resolution? She knew, during each hour and each minute of those dreadful days, that she had but to say a word—had but to hold up her finger, to make this marriage between the man she loved and another impossible for ever. Was it that she feared that, while it was yet time, she might be tempted to do so?

The thought had placed itself before her mind in more guises than one. Not to recall him, not to bring him to her side, never to speak to him or see him more! but to have the opportunity of revenging her heart's agony at the cost of fresh agony, by

refusing all suing for such restoration of the past ! Then the girl—this Stella—whom he was about to marry only because considerations of interest required him to do so—considerations which would so soon be found to be all mistaken and misleading ! Would it not be well to stop this hateful union, if it were only for her sake ? And then came the remembrance of the scene which the Gufone had described—the fact so slightly admitted by him, but which had sunk like molten lead into her heart, and lain there burning and heavy ever since,—the fact that this Stella was beautiful ; and then the storm-wind of passion raged over her soul, and, with lightning in her eyes and hot breathings distending her transparent nostrils, she swore that no act of hers should interfere to separate these lovers, or to prevent their love from drawing after it its due reward.

More than once the thought of escaping from it all by death had presented itself to her mind. She certainly had no desire to live. And she had never had any instruction which made it clear to her that death by her own deed was a deed of sin, involving punishment beyond the grave. No consideration of this order restrained her from accepting the escape

from what was intolerable thus offered. As certainly no fear of the simple deed prevented her from accomplishing it. But she could not bear to leave the world to them!—to go away and leave all free to them to enjoy their mutual love!—to go away and not to see the sequel! To see it was agony indescribable; and yet it seemed more intolerable to her to go into the grave, whence she could see it not!

Of course such misery as she was enduring could not fail to make its presence visible, not only in her bearing, but in her outward appearance. She passed most of the hours of the rapidly lengthening days on the bench on the crag, which had been her favourite haunt in happier days. She would sit there, hour after hour, gazing out over the sea, and seeing nothing save the images of the tossing thoughts within her.

The vigilance, tenderness, anxiety with which Nanni watched her during those days are not to be told! She was not kind to him. She was irritable, half maddened, desirous of solitude. Again and again would the poor Gufone creep after her to the bench on the crag which he had set up for her pleasure; and she would ungraciously bid him to

leave her, and he would humbly, but reluctantly, obey.

“Do leave me, Gufone; do not follow me to persecute me! Don’t you know I am unhappy? Do you think you can bring any comfort to me? I only want to be alone.”

“I will do as you bid me, Signora Leonora; but I thought that mayhap speaking might be better for you than silence. I will go,” the poor fellow would say, as he slouched away and left her.

Probably she might have been more kind to him had she been unaware of the fact that he too was suffering from unrequited love, and that she was the object of his passion.

At last the first day of Lent arrived, and with it, at nightfall, Signor Sandro.

He appeared to be in special good humour; nodded good-humouredly to the Gufone, who was alone in the living-room when he entered, forgetting apparently all his anger against him for his prolonged absence from home just previously to his own last departure, and asking whether his wife was up-stairs, proceeded at once to find her there.

“Sandro!” cried Lucia, jumping up to give him a kiss, “I did not hear the door, or I should

have come down. How long have you been here ? ”

“ Only this instant. It’s better you didn’t come down ; for I want to speak to you here.”

“ To me, Sandro ! ” said his wife, half pleased and half frightened.

“ To you, of course ! Who the devil else ? Now, don’t be a fool, Lucia, but listen to me. Do you remember the day when I told you that I did not intend that the child we brought from Rome should be sent to the Innocenti, but our own child, Stella, instead ? ” said Sandro, somewhat sternly, but less savagely than usual.

“ Oh, Sandro ! Yes, to be sure ! I shall never forget it, I am sure,” said Lucia, putting the corner of her apron to her eye.

“ Don’t be such a fool, I say. There was little to cry about then, and there’s less now. I dare say you thought that I was very cruel and very wicked to make you send your child away. But I told you that I knew what I was doing. If the child had remained here, it would have been dead long ago. As it is—she was married the day before yesterday to the Marchese Cesare Casaloni ! ”

“ *Santa Madonna !* Marchese Cesare Casaloni !

Why, Sandro, that is he that was with us here, and only went away a day or two back! Our Stella married to him!"

"Yes, woman! married to him! Why, what the devil has his being here got to do with it?"

"Only that—of course, when you say it, Sandro, that is enough!—but it does seem so strange!—and—I did think that he was looking after our Leonora, here, when he was living here," said Lucia, who found a difficulty in gathering up her ideas, so as to bring them to bear upon the subject in hand.

"Our Leonora!" sneered Vallardi; "yes, a very likely thing, indeed, that the Marchese Casaloni should think of marrying our child!"

"But I thought you said, Sandro," pleaded poor Lucia, more and more bewildered, that he *had* married our child, Stella?"

"Upon my soul, the stupidity of some women is enough to put a man beside himself! The man supposed Leonora to be our daughter. I say that supposing that, it was not very likely that he would think of marrying her. But he, like everybody else, supposes Stella to be the daughter of the Marchese Ercole; and supposing that he *has* married her! Is that clear enough?"

“*Santa Madonna!* Then he did not know that Stella was our child? And the marriage has been made! I should like to have seen it!” sighed the poor mother.

“I sometimes think, *Lucia mia*,” said Sandro, with a sort of despairing quietude and resignation in his manner, “that you really are pretty nearly a born idiot!”

“I know, of course, that I am not clever, as you are, Sandro. I wish I was, for then—I wish I was! But I can’t help being as I am. And I can’t help longing to see the child again, Sandro—longing till my heart is sore with longing, Sandro!” said Lucia, looking up at him with a piteous pleading in her large but sunken and dimmed blue eyes.

“Well; if you don’t bother me past all bearing, it is like enough that you will see her, and be called mother by the Marchesa Casaloni. But I don’t suppose you’ll have the sense or the grace to say or to remember that it is *my* doing; and that if I had listened to you, Stella would be a poor girl now, instead of the Marchesa Casaloni.”

“I am sure, Sandro, I always do remember, and do say, that all you do is for the best. And you



think it likely I shall see my little Stella! Oh, Sandro, it would be such a joy to me! When do you think I might hope for it?"

"Ah, when? that is the question!" said Sandro, with more toleration than he usually showed for his wife's demands; "that is just the question! Of course I don't mean that my child shall come to such a position as that, by my management, and I never a pin the better for it! That is not likely any way! Of course I mean to claim my daughter! But when? that is the question! Whether to do it right out of hand, or to wait till she has been a bit more settled in her place of heiress and Marchesa? When the time comes, we must be ready with the testimony of the Gufone and old Fermi. And, look you, Lucia, it would be as well for you just to speak to the old woman, and see that she has got the story in her stupid old head all right. All she will have to do will be to tell the real exact truth, just as it happened. You may speak to her about it! No fear that she should open her lips to anybody else, I'll go bail!"

An hour or two after the above conversation with his wife, Sandro, still with a bearing of more than ordinary good-humour and graciousness, took an

opportunity of having a talk with the Gufone. To him also he communicated the intelligence that the little Stella, whom he (Gufone) had escorted to the Innocenti Hospital at Florence, had just become the Marchesa Cesare Casaloni ;—to which announcement Nanni listened with all the appearance of astonishment which such news was calculated to call forth. He declared that all the circumstances of the journey to Rome, the receiving of the child from a stranger at the west front of the Lateran, and his subsequent journey to Florence in company with Giuditta Fermi, were as fresh in his recollection as if they had happened yesterday. He knew, he said, with perfect certainty that the Signorina Leonora was the child which was brought from Rome, and that the child which he helped to take to the Innocenti was the daughter of his patron and of Signora Lucia. And to these facts he was perfectly ready to testify when he should be called upon to do so.

“Because,” said Sandro, “of course you can understand that I do not mean my child should be the Marchesa Casaloni and I none the better for it! And we shall have to show that she is my child, and no mistake! But I have not quite made up my mind

whether it would be best to do that at once, or to wait awhile?"

"Better wait just a little while, I should say," returned the Gufone, "so as not to make it seem as if you had been waiting till the marriage was made to let the truth be known. But I don't think that I would wait very long."

All which, Sandro, being in a specially good humour, took in very good part; and was graciously pleased to say that he thought that the Gufone was right in his notion.

After which he took his gun and strolled up the hill to get an appetite for his supper; while the Gufone stole to his own little garret, where he indited a letter, directed it carefully to Dr. Anastasio Profondi, at Rome, and bounded off down the hill to post it in time for that evening's post.



## CHAPTER II.

### A VISITOR AT THE LONE HOUSE.

THE next few days passed in the house above Talamone in their usual uneventful course, indeed they were more uneventful than was ordinarily the case when the master of the family was at home. For, as has been said, Sandro was in a quieter mood, and in better humour than usual. There were no scenes of violence on the one part, and tears on the other, between him and his wife, and nothing of open and violent quarrel between him and Gufone.

It was more difficult, when Sandro was at home, for the Gufone to watch Leonora as closely as he had done, or to spend so much of his time in hovering near her, or to find an opportunity at any moment for speaking to her privately. For Sandro was not as unobservant as Lucia, and was, moreover, con-

stantly wanting the Gufone for one purpose or another. Nevertheless, Nanni did contrive, running out to the beach on the crag for the purpose, as soon as Sandro had strolled out of sight among the wood with his gun, to find Leonora alone, and to communicate to her the tidings which Vallardi had brought home with him.

“I have only a minute to tell you something, signorina,” he said, “but I would not let you pass the night without knowing it. Signor Sandro has brought the news that the marriage is done,—the marriage between Signor Cesare and his daughter Stella. He knows—he knew all the time that it was his daughter, that the Marchese supposed to be his!”

“Thank you, Gufone!” said Leonora, in a quiet voice, though a little quiver ran through her body as she said it;—“thank you, Gufone, I am glad to know that it is done. Don’t let me detain you now! Don’t let Signor Sandro find you here with me! And, dear Gufone, don’t look at me so at supper; please don’t. Now, run back to the house! I shall come in presently.”

The knowledge that was thus communicated to Leonora seemed to have the effect of tranquillising

her. She was, as any observant eye might have seen, not less sad than before. She crept about the house and the paths around it with the same sad, silent step. The fire remained as entirely quenched in the large dark eye. There was the same dull listlessness in all her movements; but the fever in her blood seemed to be assuaged. There was no longer the same degree of nervous irritability. She was quieter. The Gufone understood the nature of the change. Small knowledge of his fellow-men had he, and smaller of the world of women; and science none at all! But strong love supplied what was needed to enable him to understand what was passing in Leonora's mind. He knew that the quietude which had become possible to her, was the quietude of final despair.

A few days thus wore away. But on the fourth from the day of Signor Sandro's return, an event very unusual indeed at the lone house on the promontory occurred.

It was evening,—about the time of “the Venti-quattro,”—the sun had just gone down behind the Monte Argentario, and in a few minutes more the twilight would deepen into darkness. Signor Sandro had returned from his afternoon stroll up the hill,

and was putting away his gun in its place above the fireplace. Lucia and Leonora were both engaged listlessly and silently in placing the plates, and glasses, and hempen napkins on the table for the evening meal ; and the Gufone was just entering the room, from a door which led to the cellar stair, with a flask of wine in his hand. Nobody was speaking, and there was a dull hush in the house ; when they were all suddenly startled by a sharp knock at the house-door. The fact indicated not only that there was some one who sought admittance, but that it must be some person altogether a stranger to the house and the neighbourhood. There was no knocker on the door, and none of those who were wont ever to enter it had any idea that anything else was to be done for entering a house than putting your hand on the latch, and opening the door. The sharp knock that made all the inmates of the house jump as if a pistol shot had been fired in the room, was evidently produced by the knob of a stout walking-stick.

“ Whatever can it be ? ” said Lucia, looking at her husband.

Leonora placed the loaf of bread she had in her hand on the table, and, stepping quickly to the

stair which came down into the room, escaped upstairs.

“Open the door, Gufone,” said Signor Sandro.

Nanni put the flask he was carrying upon the table; and then, doing as he was bid in silence, saw before him a figure with which he was perfectly well acquainted, but which was that of an entire stranger to all the other persons present.

It was the Signor Dottore Anastasio Profondi.

The Gufone was on the point of exclaiming, but was checked by one of those pantomimic looks which, to an Italian, is as effectual a communication as any spoken words.

“This is the residence, I think, of Signor Alessandro Vallardi?” said Dr. Profondi, with a profound bow.

“*Sì*, signore, and I am the master of it,” said Sandro, coming forward from the fireplace, and speaking not very graciously. “May I ask what you are pleased to want of either the house or its owner?”

“Well, I *have* a little bit of business to transact with you, Signor Vallardi,” said the Roman lawyer, advancing a little into the room with his pleasantest expression of face; “nothing of an unpleasant



nature. Oh, dear me, no! Not at all! But I am afraid that I have chosen an unpropitious moment. I am afraid that I have dropped in upon you, Signor Vallardi, just as your family were about to sit down to their evening meal," he continued, looking round the room, and saluting Signora Lucia with another low bow.

Dr. Anastasio had by this time advanced into the middle of the room—had made good his footing, as it were, in the fortress; and, despite his words, there was an indefinable something about his manner which seemed to indicate that he had no immediate intention of retreating again towards the door.

To an Italian eye, it was hardly possible to mistake Dr. Anastasio for anything else than what he really was—a lawyer. Lawyers are not among the most popular members of the body social in the Maremma generally; and enough perhaps has been said in former pages to make it intelligible that Signor Sandro should feel, on the intrusion of this representative of the system called Law into his own domestic castle, much as a bull is apt to feel at the entrance of a strange mastiff into his paddock.

Nevertheless, the obnoxious functionary had declared that his purpose was not hostile, and his reference to the supper-hour was probably rather in his favour than otherwise.

"You are right, signore," said Sandro, still somewhat surlily, in reply to the lawyer's last words, "in your supposition that we were going to supper. Perhaps you have not supped yourself, and in that case might not object to doing us the honour of eating a crust and drinking a glass of wine with us. We are not fond in the Maremma of the thin sour stuff they call wine at Leghorn, and you will find the Chianti good."

"Chianti!" cried Dr. Profondi, with a very artistically-imitated sparkle of the eye, "of all the wines that grow between the Alps and the toe of the boot, recommend me to a flask of Tuscan Chianti! And it's what I don't often get, for I am not a Livornese, as you seem to imagine, but a Roman."

"A Roman, eh?" said Sandro, with a slight contraction of the brow—the result of thinking, however, rather than of displeasure.

"Yes, signore, I come from the Eternal City, and, to tell the truth, have come so recently that I shall

be glad to accept your hospitable offer of a seat at your family supper-table. In one word," continued the lawyer, coming forward towards the great blazing fire, where Sandro continued to stand, not very graciously, with his back to the blaze, and speaking with a sort of confidential bonhommie, as if he was letting Sandro into a great secret, "in one word, I am as hungry as a hunter!"

"Welcome, signore, welcome! When we say that in the Maremma we mean it. The supper will be here in a minute. Perhaps it would be better manners to wait till after it before asking what may be the nature of the business which has procured us poor folks the honour of your visit," said Sandro, who, in truth, was on thorns till he knew what the stranger wanted with him.

"Not at all; not at all, my dear sir," said the lawyer; "but—" and here he glanced at the Gufone with an expression that told Sandro as plainly as if he said it with his tongue, that he would prefer speaking to his host's ears alone.

"Gufone, go and get another flask of wine; don't let the gentleman suppose that that flask on the table is the last in the house," said Sandro, in reply to the lawyer's look.

Nanni obeyed, and the lawyer and Signor Vallardi were left alone together.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Signor Vallardi," said the lawyer, in a confidential tone, as soon as Nanni had disappeared down the cellar stairs, "to tell you the truth, my business, strictly speaking, is not with you at all; it is rather with a certain member of your family, whom I had reason to think I should find here, but whom I have not yet seen. Have you not a young lady in the house?"

"What, my daughter?" said Sandro, who thought that he could now form some guess at what the lawyer's business referred to, though it was still a mystery to him by what side the matter was to be or had been approached. However, he knew that the marriage of his daughter Stella with the heir of the house of Casaloni was an accomplished fact; and, of course, his intention of avowing that Stella *was* his daughter involved the assertion of the fact that Leonora was *not*; so that the apparent probability that this fact had been discovered at length in some other way did not much disturb him; and he was fully prepared for the lawyer's reply to calling Leonora his daughter.

The reply, however, came in Dr. Profondi's own

peculiar manner. Sometimes he abounded in words ; sometimes he was very chary of them. On this occasion, for all reply to Sandro's speaking of Leonora as his daughter, he took out his snuff-box, offered his host a pinch, took one very deliberately himself, and then, elevating his elbow, touched his companion in the ribs with it, while he executed an elaborate wink of a most eloquent kind.

Sandro looked at him rather grimly in silence for half-a-minute, before he answered him.

“You come from Rome, signore. I dare say ways and customs are different there to what they are here in the Maremma ; but in these parts, do you know, a stranger who came into a man's house meddling with the secrets of his family in an inconvenient manner might like enough find the country so charming as to stay and end his days there, and save his relatives all the botheration of a funeral and the fees for lying in holy ground. But as it happens, I have no objection to your knowing—or to anybody else knowing—that the girl up-stairs (you will see her presently) is not my daughter. My daughter—the only one I have—was married the other day to the Marchese Cesare Casaloni,” concluded Sandro carelessly.

"Indeed, my dear sir! indeed! Allow me to congratulate you! Yes, I was aware that the Marchese Cesare had recently married; but I had imagined that the lady had been his cousin, the daughter of the Marchese Ercole."

"There were others who imagined the same thing," replied Sandro, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows. "What would you have, Signor Dottore? I presume I am speaking to a gentleman of the law, though I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Anastasio Profondi—Dottore Anastasio Profondi, Procuratore—at your service," said the lawyer, with a pleasant smile and a polite bow, to which Sandro replied, with an equally low but graver salutation. "As I was saying, Signor Dottore," he resumed, "What would you have? If people will send their children away from them and lose sight of them, is it my fault if they make mistakes when they take it into their heads to want to find them again?"

"Your fault indeed! how should it be, my dear sir?" said the lawyer, with a waive of his hand. "So the young lady who has just been married at the Villa Casaloni was your daughter! Dear me! I am sure I congratulate you with all my heart!

A great match—a very great match! The Casaloni are one of the first families in Rome. The young lady, as I have heard, was discovered at the Innocenti in Florence. Dear me! And she was your daughter? God bless me! At the Innocenti, was it not?" asked Dr. Anastasio, quite cheerily.

"*Sì*, signore, at the Innocenti in Florence. What would you have, again? I had undertaken that my wife should nurse this little stranger from Rome. I hoped that she would have been able to do so together with her own child. It turned out otherwise. She was not able to do justice to both the little girls; and my duty and fidelity to the charge I had undertaken compelled me to send my own child to the hospital."

"It was a great sacrifice to a stern sense of duty, which Providence has rewarded in its own time and in its own manner," said the lawyer, in a tone of mock cant. "You will have no objection then, Signor Vallardi, to my speaking to the young lady on the subject presently. You will doubtless be desirous of claiming your own child, and it will be necessary to restore the other to her parents, you know."

"No objection at all, Signor Dottore. *Anzi!* you

will only be doing for me what I should have had to do for myself. You may say all you have to say, and welcome. I do not quite understand, though, for whom you are acting. Am I to understand that the Marchese Ercole and the Lady Elena have become aware of the fact that the young lady they have just married to their cousin is not their own daughter?"

"Not so, signore; not so. They are still under the erroneous impression that the Marchese Cesare has married their daughter. It will be necessary to undeceive them. Ah, yes! By-the-bye, who am I acting for? I am employed, in fact, by another member of the family. I will explain that part of the subject presently. Here comes your young friend with the wine."

The Gufone had not been in the cellar all the time the above conversation had lasted. Passing out by a door which opened on to the outhouse, behind the main part of the building, he had—together with the Signora Lucia—been engaged in making some hasty preparation for giving the guest a somewhat better supper than that which awaited the family; and now Lucia and her supposed daughter came down, and began to put the materials for the



meal upon the table. The stranger bowed lowly to the ladies as they entered the room, looking with keen interest at Leonora, but saying no word of allusion to his business with reference to her. So the family and their guest sat down to table, and the lawyer made a very good supper, not sparing the good Chianti, which he praised enthusiastically. During the supper the Gufone endeavoured more than once so to catch his eye as to gather from him some hint as to the position of affairs which had induced him to visit the Maremma; but Dr. Profondi vouchsafed him no such information. Nobody could have guessed, from any portion of his manner, that he had ever seen the Gufone before or took the smallest interest in him. He made himself generally agreeable, however; chatted with his host and hostess about Rome, about the Maremma, about the differences between the Tuscan and Roman portions of the district so named; and made the meal pass very much more agreeably to all parties than was usually the case in the lone house on the promontory.



### CHAPTER III.

#### GUFONE HOLDS HIS OWN.

As soon as the supper was over the Signora Lucia, as was her wont, got up to leave the room, and Leonora rose to follow her up the stair that led to the sleeping-rooms above. Sandro looked up as if he expected that the lawyer would say something to prevent the latter from leaving the room ; but Profondi made a bow to the ladies, and gave Sandro a nod aside, which seemed to intimate that he would prefer to have some further conversation with him before breaking his intelligence to the young object of it. Of course, he was in truth perfectly well aware that Leonora was already informed of all he professed to have come there to tell her.

“ If you wish to speak to me alone,” said the host, as soon as the women had gone up-stairs, “ Il Gufone

here will make himself scarce. You need not make any ceremony about him."

"Well, I thought it as well that some other little matters to be spoken of should be set straight without troubling the ladies. But as to our young friend here, the fact is that, as he is partly interested in what I have to say, he might perhaps as well stay," said the lawyer.

"Ah, you mean about the share he had in the bringing of the child from Rome. Yes. And I suppose I shall need his evidence to prove that it was my child, and not the Roman child, that was sent to Florence?" said Sandro.

"Ah, yes, yes, very true! But it was not wholly with reference to that—a—aspect of the subject that I was alluding. It is a curious thing, Signor Sandro, how many strange circumstances,—how many strange stories are and have been connected with the transmission of inheritance,—both in name and property—from one generation to another in our great families. We lawyers of course see and know more of these things than other people. And I could tell you dozens of queer stories connected with many of our noble names!"

"No doubt, Signor Dottore! And I dare say

that the knowledge is often profitable enough!" said Sandro, with a look that was meant to be knowing.

"The knowledge of such matters may sometimes be profitable;—sometimes inconvenient in more ways than one," returned the lawyer, carelessly. "I dare say," he added, more as if he were speaking to himself than his hearers,—“I dare say that the family histories of the nobodies would be just as curious, if one only came to know them!—But one don't, you see, Signor Sandro! One don't know them! Now there's Casaloni! What a strange story it is!"

"What, the mistaking another child for their own? Ah, yes! That comes of changing their minds, you see!" said Sandro, with a shrug.

"Ah, yes!—yes!—yes! But it is so strange that there should be a double story, as one may say, going on at the same time! Two members of the family lost sight of, quite separately one from the other, and then turning up in the same place! Very queer! very!"

"Yes! odd enough that he should have found his way here! But you see, Signor Dottore, when a man has been playing the game that Signor Cesare

played, it is convenient to be lost sight of, as you say! And this Maremma is a good place for the purpose!"

"No doubt! No doubt! Signor Sandro," said the lawyer, with a queer look at his host; "but I was not thinking of Signor Cesare, but of the head of the family. Is it not a strange chance that just when the supposed heiress of the family is found here, the real head of the family should turn up in the same place?"

"How the head of the family, if you don't mean the Marchese Cesare? The Marchese Ercole, he that was a Monsignore, is the head of the family, I suppose, if Signor Cesare is not considered so yet?"

"Ah, then my young friend here has not told you his news! Well, perhaps it was best to say nothing about it, till all was safe and sure! One should not count chickens before they are hatched, Signor Sandro! But if you have heard nothing about it, I have a surprise for you. The head of the Casaloni family, the present Marchese, is none other than our young friend here!" said the lawyer, throwing himself back in his chair, sticking his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and nodding at the Gufone.

Il Gufone kept his eye on his patron while this announcement was made, very much as if he expected that it would be immediately followed by a trencher at his head, which he was fully prepared to avoid with his usual dexterity. Sandro, however, only stared at him in blank astonishment; and Il Gufone grinned at him, and nodded his shock head in return, from the other side of the table.

“It is odd, isn’t it?” said the lawyer, after the pause of a minute or two.

“Odd!” cried Vallardi, filling his tumbler, and tossing off the draught, “*accidente*, if I know what you mean. This fellow, Il Gufone, Marchese Casaloni! And what is the Marchese Ercole, then? I don’t believe a word of it!”

“*Padrone, padronissimo!* signore; as far as that goes! But as for who and what the Marchese Ercole is, if you wish to know, he is—the Marchese Ercole *dei* Casaloni, uncle to our young friend there!” said the lawyer, not a little enjoying the astonishment of his host.

“His uncle!—his uncle! Well, then, how can Gufone be the head of the family?”

“Very easily; *carissimo mio signore*. He is the

head of the family because his father was the elder brother of the Marchese Ercole."

"What, he that died the other day?" said Sandro.

"No! not he that died the other day. He was the second brother. Our young friend's father was the eldest of three brothers."

Again there was a pause of some minutes; which was occupied by Sandro in attempting to understand the bearing the extraordinary facts revealed to him, and the influence that, it began to dawn upon him, they might have on the value of the marriage of his daughter, which had just rewarded his long scheming.

"It is a good thing for Signor Cesare, any way," he said, "that all this was not found out before the property was left to him; or else, I suppose, he would never have had a penny of it! And as for you, 'my young friend,' as the lawyer here calls you," he continued, with a nod at Gufone, "I don't see that all they have found out is likely to do you much good. You may be Marchese Gufone, or Marchese Casaloni, if you like; but it does not seem as if you were likely to get a crust of bread, or a glass of wine out of it!"

The Gufone only shrugged and grinned in reply to this. But the lawyer was more perspicuous.

“ You don’t quite understand the legal bearings of the case, Signor Vallardi,” said he drily, and with a very perceptible pleasure in the signal discomfiture he was preparing for his host ;—“ don’t see the matter altogether in a legal point of view ! Signor Cesare, you see, comes into the possession of the family estates, as the heir under the will of the Marchese Adriano. But what if the Marchese Adriano was not the rightful possessor of them ! A man cannot give away what is not his to give, you understand, signore *mio* ! The estates in question never belonged to the Marchese Adriano. They belonged to the son and heir of his elder brother, the father of my client here ; and from him come by right descent to his son here, don’t you see ? ”

“ I never heard such a parcel of stuff in my life ! ” said Sandro, who was beginning to get angry, as the nature of the position opened itself to his comprehension. “ What is to become of Signor Cesare then ? Why, he was brought to the villa, there under Montamiata, on purpose to be the heir and the future head of the family. It was all settled ! ”

“ Very true, *stimatissimo mio signore* ! ” said the



lawyer, smiling affably ; “ but those who so settled it had no power to settle it at all ! All their settlement is waste paper ;—all their bequeathing of property, which did not belong to them, is of no effect whatsoever. And as for Signor Cesare, with whom I have not the honour to be personally acquainted, all that I can say is that he is and will be the same man, and in the same position in which he stood before the Marchese had taken it into his head to make him his heir.”

“ Well, that would be as pretty a piece of rascality as any I ever heard of ! What ! take a man, or, what is worse, a boy, and for years together make him believe that he is the heir of a great fortune, and then one fine day tell him all of a sudden that it was all a mistake, and that he is not worth a *soldo* in the world ! Why, you don’t suppose, Signor Dottore, that my son-in-law is going to let himself be ousted out of his rights in that way ! You don’t suppose, I should think, that I, his father-in-law, am going to stand by and see my child wronged in that way ! I can only tell you, Signore Dottore, that you are very much mistaken if you do ! ”

“ Humph ! ” jerked out the lawyer, shrugging

his shoulders ; “ I perfectly agree with you, my dear sir, in thinking that the position of Signor Cesare is a very hard one—very hard—and decidedly disagreeable ; disagreeable to you also, inasmuch as you are connected with him by the tie you mention. But——” and here the lawyer paused and took a long pinch of snuff,—“ but I confess that I do not see how you are to do anything to alter it. I don’t see it, I don’t indeed. You have no *locus standi* in the matter, as we lawyers say ; that is—pardon me for the bit of Latin—the law does not recognise that you have anything to do with the matter, or—or anything to say to it.”

“ *Per Bacco !* The law thinks so, does it ! But it *might* be—it is just possible that such a thing might happen as that the law and I should be of a different opinion on that point. And *per Dio !* those who know Sandro Vallardi best would tell you that in case of such a difference of opinion, he is not exactly the man to give up his opinion merely because he is told that the law thinks differently.”

“ Quite so, quite so ! *Stimatissimo signore mio !*” answered the lawyer, with the most unruffled tran-

quillity; "I have the greatest respect for a man who holds by his own opinion. I would not seek to change it on any account. But the mischief of it is, that the law is apt to act altogether on its own view of the matter, you see!"

"It seems to me, Signore Dottore," said Sandro, with increasing anger and a lowering brow,—“it seems to me that you do not quite remember where you are. You talk very much as you would if you were in your own studio at Rome, with all the Pope's *sbirri* to back you. That's the sort of thing you are used to. But you are in the Maremma here, *mio colendissimo signore*,—in the Maremma; do you hear? And that is quite a different sort of thing. We Maremma folks, if you will excuse me for saying so, are not particularly fond of law or lawyers.”

“Ha! ha! ha! And upon my word the Maremma folks are in the right of it. If I were giving advice to a brother or dear friend of my own, I should say, Whatever you do, have nothing to do with law and lawyers! But upon my word, Signor Vallardi, I don't see how that can avail to help you over the stile we were speaking of just now.”

“Ha, you don’t, don’t you! Now I’ll wager that our young friend here, the Marchese Gufone Casaloni, sees perfectly well how help may be found in the circumstances I was pointing out to your worship. He knows the Maremma, you see, and he knows me; and you don’t! And that makes a difference!” said Sandro, while the dangerous look in his eyes and the scowl on his face grew fiercer and blacker.

“But as I don’t know, and as such matters are new to me, would you mind explaining to me a little, signore, how all these facts to which you allude are to have any bearing on the question in hand?” returned the lawyer, with undiminished good humour.

“Gufone, go and fetch another flask of wine. This is finished, and it is dry talking,” said Sandro, with curt sternness.

The Gufone, Marchese as he was, very docilely arose to obey as he had for so many years been in the habit of doing. And as soon as he was gone, Sandro got up, and stood with his back to the fire.

“You want to know,” he said, looking hard into the lawyer’s face, “how I can find any help

for the wrong you were telling me was to be done against my child in those little circumstances I was drawing your attention to. Now look here, Signor Dottore, we are speaking *a quattro occhi*, with four eyes present only, and therefore may speak plainly. It was for that purpose that I sent your precious Marchese client down to the cellar to fetch my wine for me. Perhaps you may know—but I declare I don't know—what is to prevent my taking care that Dr. Anastasio Profondi should never be heard of any more in Rome, or anywhere else?"

"You are not accurate, *pregiatissima* Signor Vallardi," replied the lawyer, smiling and shaking his head. "You mean that you could easily prevent my ever being *seen* again in Rome or elsewhere. But you could not prevent my being heard of! And I am sure that a man of your intelligence cannot fail to observe that that makes all the difference,—really quite *all* the difference! Besides that, after all, what good would getting rid of *me* do? The right heir would remain! You would have to dispose of our young friend also!"

"Quite true, Signor Dottore," said Sandro, quietly; "you have a very practical way of look-

ing at things. And were it not that it would be impossible to trust to your discretion—excuse me for saying so—the matter might be easily settled by merely putting this poor misshapen devil of a Gufone out of the way. Once get rid of him, and Signor Cesare would stand where he did before.”

“Excellently well reasoned, signore! But even if both I and my client were disposed of, are there no others afflicted with the mania of talking about what does not concern them—nobody else who would be likely to make mischief by chattering?” said the lawyer, composedly.

“No, Signore Dottore; nobody else,” rejoined Vallardi, with a sudden increase of fierce earnestness in his manner. “You and your ugly client, as you call him, are here in my house, in the heart of the Maremma; and you are as much in my power as a couple of ants running across my path in the forest. Why, as for that wretched devil of a boy—there!” and Sandro strode across the room as he spoke, and drew a heavy bolt across the door leading to the cellar, (it was a mere piece of melodrame; for he knew that there was another exit from the cellar to the open air); “there! unless I will it, he need never see the light of day again.

And as for you," he continued, looking at the lawyer straight in the eyes, and drawing his own powerful frame together with a sort of undulating movement of the loins and shoulders, that might have reminded one of the preparation a tiger makes for his spring, "as for you; with my right hand in my breeches pocket,"—putting it there as he uttered the word,—“my left on your windpipe would be quite enough to save you any further trouble in this tiresome world. And there is room enough in the forest for a grave with no cross to mark it, or even, if you would like it better, in the soil of the vault underneath this room.”

As he finished speaking, the Gufone was heard trying to open the cellar door from the inside.

“Here’s the wine! Open the door, will you, Signor Sandro? What the plague is it bolted for?” he cried from within.

“To keep you where you are, Signor Marchese!” cried Vallardi. “Your lordship will never get a grave in the family chapel; for I don’t mean you ever to come out of that cellar again.”

“Why you know there’s another way out, you great tall fool! But I am not going to take the trouble of using it. You sent me for the wine.

Here it is. Open the door, Signor Sandro, like a wise man ; for I've got a light ; there's plenty of straw in the cellar ; and the rafters are very dry. If you don't open the door, *amico mio*, in less than a minute, I shall be obliged to burn the house down."

"Come out, you cur !" said Sandro, going to the cellar door, and opening it with a promptitude that much amused the lawyer. "You'll burn the house down, you imp of the devil, will you ?" he continued, as Nanni was emerging from the door with the flask of wine in his hand. "I should like to see you at it," he added, aiming as he spoke a blow at the Gufone's head.

The latter, with the quickness of light, interposed the big flask between his cheek and the coming blow, in such sort that the thin, fragile glass was shattered, the two quarts and a half or so of the good red Chianti was splashed over both of them, and made a great dark pool on the floor, and Sandro cut his fingers with the glass.

"There, you great clumsy blockhead ! there runs better blood than yours or mine either. It was not my fault, Signor Dottore. He can't learn to keep his hands off me, though he knows he always gets the worst of it."



“ You cursed, infernal spawn of the devil ! ” growled Sandro, wiping his cut fingers ; “ take your fill of jaw ; for, by God, you shan’t have much more time for it ! ”

“ It seems not to suit our friend Signor Vallardi, Signore Marchese, that you should succeed to your title and estates,” said the lawyer ; “ and he was thinking of making an end of both of us here. But I was telling him that it would never answer.”

“ He make an end of me ! ” said the Gufone, goggling his great eyes, and grinning a grim smile that showed a tremendous range of great white teeth. “ Lord bless you, Signor Dottore ; he is very big, and very strong, and as savage as a wild boar at times ; but he is too stupid and clumsy to do much mischief. He is always hurting himself when he tries to hurt me. Shall I tie up your finger for you, Signor Sandro ? ”

Sandro looked at the two men—the Gufone first, and then the lawyer—with a heavy, dangerous-looking scowl upon his brow, and then walked slowly to the front door, and turning a huge key which was in the lock, drew it out and deliberately put it in his pocket.

While he was doing so, the Gufone quickly and

silently took a glass from the table, in which there were a few teaspoonfuls of wine, and poured them over the lock of a large pistol which hung by the side of the great fireplace.

“So! you mean to be Marchese Casaloni, do you, young gentleman? And you mean to come across me and mine, by making him so, do you, Signor Dottore? We shall see!” and as he spoke he took in his hand the pistol, which had been the object of Nanni’s attention.

“I am afraid you will find that powder damp, Signor Sandro,” said he; “but I know where there is plenty of dry! We always keep a largish stock in the house, Signor Dottore; for what the government sells is bad and dear; and Signor Sandro, who is sensible enough in some things—more than you would think for,—does not like paying the government tax on their rubbish. So we get our powder—where it grows, you know—and we always have a good stock of it. I know where it is, Signor Sandro! And, Lord bless you, it would make such a blaze! And I’ve got a match in my pocket. But it is dry talking, as you said, Signor Sandro. Shall I go for another flask of wine?”

“I believe the cursed animal would blow the

house and all in it to hell, as soon as look!" said Sandro, throwing down on the table the pistol, after a glance at the lock of it, and speaking more to himself than to the lawyer, who, well persuaded that Vallardi knew better than to carry his threat into execution, had watched the foregoing scene with amused curiosity.

"Yes; go, dog! and bring another flask," he added.

"If you shut the door again, I shall fire the rafters at once, without giving you any warning this time, mind!" said Nanni, going once more to the cellar door.

"Seriously, Signor Vallardi," said Profondi, as soon as they were alone together; "putting joking aside, you must be aware that no scheme of getting Signor Cesare out of his present position, and into his late position, by making away with me and my client, would be likely to answer. You would only hurt yourself, as our young friend says; and hurt yourself pretty considerably, too! Think a little how it would be. Suppose me comfortably dead and under ground, here, in your Maremma soil. I don't return to my home. There are plenty of people in Rome who know exactly where I went to when I

left the city.” (This was not the case. There was not a soul in Rome who knew anything of the lawyer’s errand. But he had enough belief in the possibility of danger from Vallardi’s threats to make him think it worth while to conceal the circumstance from his hospitable host.) “Think of the inquiry that would be made! Such a bother, you know! They are not over fond at Florence, you will say, of troubling themselves much about what happens down here in the Maremma. Well and good! But when the Papal nuncio at Florence began to open his mouth, do you not think there would be a rumpus? Why, half the Grand-duke’s army would be buzzing about your ears, *amico mio*, if it was necessary. It wouldn’t *do*, my dear sir; it wouldn’t *do*!” concluded the lawyer, taking a pinch of snuff, as the Gufone returned again from the cellar, and this time brought his flask of wine in safety to the table.

In fact, Sandro began to perceive that it would *not* do! There might very possibly have been serious danger of mischief, if the Gufone had not had the presence of mind to incapacitate Signor Sandro’s pistol from doing any harm. But it is probable that his violence and menaces proceeded

more from anger and ill-humour, than from any really deliberate plan of getting rid of the Gufone and his claims in the manner he had spoken of.

"Humph! I am not so sure of that!" growled Sandro, filling his own glass first, and then that of the lawyer, and nodding to him.

"Aren't you going to fill my glass too, Signor Sandro?" said the Gufone, pushing it forward.

"Fill it yourself, with an *accidente* to you!" replied his patron, pushing the flask, however, towards him.

"Ah, there's no teaching you manners, Signor Sandro! One may as well give it up," said Nanni, filling his own glass for himself as he spoke.

"I'll tell you what would be more to the purpose, Signor Vallardi," said the lawyer. "The case of Signor Cesare is a hard one—a very hard one certainly. And if, instead of murdering the Marchese there, and me too—I trust he will think it reasonable to remember the danger I have been in, when I send in my bill—if, instead of that plan, you were to urge upon our young friend here the propriety of taking Signor Cesare's claims into consideration, I for one should be willing to do all in my power to support the application."

"What, ask the Gufone here for his kind consideration and bounty, eh?" said Sandro, with a sneer.

"It does seem queer, doesn't it, Signor Sandro?" said Nanni. "I can't quite believe it myself. Well, you see, Signor Dottore, I have great reason to be thankful to Signor Sandro Vallardi for consideration, kindness, and gentleness, in word and deed, for many years. It has been quite a pleasure to live with such a good-natured, handsome, and clever gentleman. I have great cause, too, to look back with pleasure to the time that Signor Cesare passed here. And I know another, a friend of mine, who has great reason to be thankful for the chance that brought him here. So that, on the whole, it is probable that if ever I get an opportunity of serving him, I shall be more than happy to do so!"

The Gufone uttered the latter part of this speech with a kind of quiet, ironical bitterness, which was entirely lost upon Sandro, and of which the lawyer did not understand the meaning.

The remainder of the conversation, however, was of a more pacific and business-like character than could have been predicted from the commencement of it; and before the second flask had been finished,

a plan of action for the assertion of the rights of the Marchese Gufone Casaloni, as Vallardi would persist in calling him, had been decided on with the concurrence of that gentleman.



## CHAPTER IV.

AT THE OLD TRYSTING-PLACE FOR THE LAST TIME.

WHEN the evening sitting at Signor Vallardi's house came to an end, Dr. Profondi professed not to be able to find his way down to the bed he had secured in the little town alone, and took his client with him to show him the way. It may very possibly have been that the lawyer, with the caution of his profession, thought it upon the whole better, notwithstanding his small belief in the reality of Sandro's murderous intentions, that the Gufone should not sleep that night under Vallardi's roof. At all events, he so managed matters that Nanni did not make his appearance at his home till the following morning. Then he and Sandro met very much as if nothing at all out of the common way had passed between them. If any change of manner could have



been observed on the part of either of them, it was a rather greater degree of good-nature in his patron's behaviour towards his henchman. And it is probable that, notwithstanding the sneer with which Sandro had received the lawyer's hint, to the effect that his wisest plan would be to hope for the Gufone's kind consideration of the hardship of Signor Cesare's case, he had not been altogether deaf to the suggestion, or too proud to perceive the wisdom of it.

Nanni's chief care and business, however, that morning were to obtain a quiet conversation with Leonora. It was necessary to inform her of the course of action which had been agreed upon the night before; and the time was come for the Gufone to let her know the secret of his own birth, and his relationship to herself.

It was in no triumphant or happy spirit that he looked forward to the making of this revelation. On the contrary, he dreaded it. He dreaded, in the first place, and mainly, that Leonora would manifest repugnance to recognising the tie of blood that existed between them; that it would become perceptible to him, that it was repulsive to her. And in the next place he dreaded, lest it might seem to her that he expected, or at least nourished some

amount of hope, that she would be less indisposed to accept the proffered love of the Marchese Casaloni, than she had been to listen to that of the vagabond Gufone. He had indeed no such hope. And yet—and yet—he was minded to try once more whether all hope, all chance was shut against him for ever. At least, he would place under her eyes the contrast between his own unchanging, undying affection, and the conduct of Cesare. At least, she should know that title, rank, fortune, were to him as dust in the balance,—were, in deed and in truth, utterly valueless to him, unless she would consent to share them with him. He had not much hope. He remembered the verdict of the glassy pool by the side of the way as he journeyed homeward from Rome! And he told himself that what he would so gladly have given life to secure was impossible to him.

It was in no light-hearted or triumphant mood that he went to the usual trysting-place, hoping to find Leonora there in the early morning.

He was not disappointed! There she was, sitting on the bench, with her hands listlessly lying in her lap before her, and her eyes looking into the far distance, and seeing nothing but the reflections of the thoughts within her.

“I was glad you went away up-stairs last night, signorina,” said Nanni, “for Signor Sandro got angry, and there were some rough words.”

“What was he angry about, Gufone?” asked Leonora, in a careless, listless manner.

“Oh, about things which the lawyer had to tell him, and which did not please him!” replied Nanni.

“About me, I suppose!” she said, with a sad and tired look in her eyes. “What a trouble it all is about no good! I wish, Gufone, that nothing had been found out about it! I wish that *she* was the Marchesa, really!”

“There were other things to tell him about;—things which he knew nothing about before;—and that made him very angry. Signor Cesare, who has married his daughter without knowing it, and who everybody thought was the Marehese, and the heir to all the estates, is nothing of the kind! It is all a mistake. And Signor Cesare has no fortune at all! That was what Sandro heard for the first time last night!” said the Gufone, sorrowfully.

“Whose is the fortune then?” said Leonora, with very little appearance of caring what the answer might be.

“Mine, it seems!” said the Gufone.

“What do you mean, Gufone? What is yours?” asked Leonora, again without manifesting any increase of interest in the matter.

“Why the fortune, and the lands, and the title, that they thought belonged to Signor Cesare!” said the Gufone, with the air of one making a rather disagreeable confession.

“Yours! Gufone! I don’t understand. How can the things be yours?” said Leonora.

“Because I am the Marchese Casaloni, Signorina Leonora. At least so they say!” replied Nanni, in the same tone.

“Gufone! What can you mean? We are neither of us, I think, much in a mood for joking, or else I should think you were making fun.”

“No, signorina! I never felt less inclined to be merry! It does not seem to be a very happy thing to be found out to be a Marchese! But then I don’t know that I was any happier before! Any way it is no joke, Signora Leonora. It seems that the Marchese Adriano, he that intended to leave the property to Signor Cesare, was never the rightful owner of it at all. My father was his eldest brother. I never knew before who my father was! Now it appears that he was the Marchese Casaloni, the eldest

of three brothers, of whom the Marchese Adriano was the second, and the Marchese Ercole, your father, Signora Leonora, the third. That's how it is that I am the Marchese Casaloni! But what is the good of being Marchese, or Principe, or anything else!" concluded the Gufone, with a twist away from her of his slouching shoulders, and a deeper drooping of his great ungainly head upon his chest.

"Oh, Gufone! Why do you say it is no good!" returned Leonora, flushing crimson, and she also half turning away from him, and dropping her eyes to the ground. It is hardly to be supposed but that she was very well aware why it was no good to the poor Gufone to be anything under the sun, save the one thing, which she knew but too well that he could never be!

"Why do I say so! Why!" rejoined the Gufone, with a concentrated bitterness of tone, while a look as of intense bodily pain came over his features. "But I suppose there is no reason why you should be able to guess why? And yet—one would have thought you might guess;—seeing why it is that it is no pleasure to you to be found to be a Marchesa! And you—because of—because of so short a time! But I because of the long, long years!

Not because of any new face ; but because of the little dark-haired child I taught and tended, and who ran crying after the Gufone for all it wanted, from morning to evening ! Ah ! Leonora, Leonora, what is all the world and all the riches in it to me, when it is impossible that you should love me ! ”

He turned as if he were about to move away, forgetting that he had not spoken a word of the arrangements, which he had specially come thither to tell her off. But she turned, with the abundant tears streaming from her eyes, and caught his hand and said :—

“ But, *Gufone mio*, I do love you ! Don’t you know that I have always loved you dearly ; and that now—now—I have nobody else to love ;—nobody in all the world ! And by what you say, Gufone, we are cousins, you and I ! Your father was my father’s brother ! First cousins, you know !—so that—so that, you know—so that—of course I love you very much ! I am so glad that we are cousins, cousin Nanni ! ”

“ Ay ! Ay ! Ay ! Yes, we are cousins, cousin Leonora ! Yes ! I understand ! I understand ! ” said poor Nanni, with a sigh that was almost a groan, and shaking his huge head slowly, with his

eyes fixed on the ground. "But I am thankful, cousin Leonora!" he continued, after a minute's silence, "I am thankful that it is not displeasing to you to be even my cousin! I thought—I feared that—perhaps—perhaps—Oh, Leonora, I do love you so! I love you with such a love, that if you cannot love me, all the world and all in the world is of no use and no pleasure to me! Oh! if you could but love me! If you could but love me, were it but a little!"

Leonora sighed deeply,—a long, long sigh, which came quivering up from the very bottom of her heart. She remained for a minute or two silent, still holding his hand, which she had taken to prevent him from going away, but holding it in a manner that indicated that she was doing so mechanically only, and that the action had no connection with what was passing in her mind. At last she turned so as to face him, and looked up at him directly in the face. There was a sweet, serious sadness in her eyes, and in her voice, as she said:—

"*Gufone mio!*—cousin! do you not know, can you not guess that I can never love any man more—with that love that you want me to love you with!—never, never more! And if, as I think,

you have loved me so—so as to be able to understand how miserable I am this day,—then you will never love anybody else. But think, cousin, how much worse my sorrow is than yours! It is not necessary to explain it; I could not do it! It is dreadful to say what I have said! But I say it to give you comfort, my poor Gufone! Think whether my sorrow is not worse than yours! Let neither of us ever think any more of love in this world!”

“I know that I ought never to have thought of it,” said Nanni, with profound discouragement; “but it is very—very hard to bear! I wish that all this trouble about who is to be the Marchese had never come about. I think I could have borne it better as I was before.”

“But I am glad, Nanni, that we are cousins. I like to be that!” said Leonora gently.

“God for ever bless you, Leonora!” said Nanni, with intense feeling; and then there was again silence between them for a while.

“But I have not told you, signorina,” resumed Nanni suddenly, as if he were waking out of a reverie, “I have not told you what I came here to say to you. I did not come here to say anything of all that I have been saying, believe me, Leonora.



I did not mean to say anything of the kind at all. Only—only I could not help myself somehow. What I came here to tell you was what we agreed—that is, what the lawyer said had better be done. He wishes you to go with him and with me to the Villa Casaloni, where your father and mother are, and—and where *he* is, and Stella, his wife.”

“I will go,” said Leonora quietly but promptly, bending her head as she spoke.

The Gufone was surprised at her prompt acquiescence, and looked as if he was so.

“I would not have gone there before he was married for all the world and all that is in it,” she said, “while—while it might have seemed—as long as it might have been thought that—that—that—”

“Yes, yes! I understand, signorina; I understand;” replied Nanni, nodding his head very gravely. “There can be no such idea in the mind of anybody now.”

“No, not one,” she said, with a long, quivering sigh; and then, recovering herself, and drawing herself up with a serene dignity of manner, she continued, “so now I am willing to go, and to see this Stella once and to see him once again. I shall see,

too, my mother and my father!" she added with a piteous sense of desolateness weighing at her heart.

"*Si*, signora; and they will know that you are their daughter, and that the daughter whom they think they have found is not their daughter. You must remember, Signora Leonora, that they do not know yet anything about the mistake they have made," said the Gufone.

"And this lawyer, Gufone *mio*? Did you know him before? It seems all so strange! I wish it were the old times back again, before—before—before any stranger had ever come here! I was as happy as the day was long then; and now I shall never be happy again!" she said, as the tears gathered in her eyes.

"Old times never come back again in this world!" said the Gufone, looking at her with infinite tenderness in his heart, and with what would have been seen to be the expression of infinite tenderness in his face if Nature had not denied to that face the power of giving the recognised outward signs of any such emotion. When men have such faces it is generally understood that there can be no such emotions in their hearts; and so the world contains a few tragedies the more.

“*Did* you ever know him before—this lawyer?” said Leonora again.

“*Si*, signora! I have seen him before. It was he who found out all about me, and who my father was; and so I thought that the best thing to do about letting it be known that Stella was the real daughter of Sandro Vallardi would be to tell him all about it.”

“And he is to go with me—with us—to the villa where my father and mother are?” asked Leonora.

“That is what he advises, signorina; and I believe that Signor Sandro means to go too.”

“What for? Do you know, Gufone, why he means to go?” she said.

“I don’t know,” returned Nanni, listlessly. “I suppose because he hopes to find some advantage for himself or for his daughter somehow.”

“And when do they mean that we should go, Gufone? You will go, of course. I would not go without you—that is, if I could help myself,” she added, with a child-like feeling of helplessness.

There came a bright gleam of pleasure over poor Nanni’s face as she said this, but it faded away in the next moment.

"Yes, I am to go with you!" he said sadly, adding, after a minute, with a wan smile, "I am glad that it will be a comfort to you, Signora Leonora, that I should be with you."

"Why, of course it will, cousin Nanni! Have we not always been together? What would have become of me all my life without you? and we never guessed that we were cousins all the time! It is very strange! When are we to go?"

"The lawyer is in a hurry to get back to Rome. He does not want to stay here longer than he can help. I almost think, do you know, signorina, that he is half afraid of Sandro. He wants to go away this afternoon, so as to reach the villa to-morrow."

"Is it so far, then—as far as to Rome?" asked Leonora in surprise.

"No, signorina; not nearly so far; but there are no roads—not such roads as a carriage can travel by. And this lawyer from Rome has no idea of walking across the country, as we should do."

"I wish, Gufone, now that we are cousins, you would leave off calling me signora and signorina! Call me cousin Leonora. We are to go away this afternoon, then?"

"I believe they mean to start after dinner, and to

reach the Villa Casaloni to-morrow afternoon, cousin Leonora," returned Nanni.

"I will be ready, cousin," she replied; "and I should like to be by myself till then, for I want to think of what is coming when I get there. But I must go and say good-bye to mother—that is, to Signora Lucia, I mean. Do you suppose, Nanni, that we shall come back here?"

"I suppose not, cousin. Why should we come back here? We have no business here," returned Nanni.

"Ah, I suppose so!" she said with a sigh; "but I should be sorry never to see this place, and this bench here, again, Gufone! Ah, me!"

"It is the only place in all the world that I shall ever care to see again!" returned Nanni.

"Let us go to the house now, cousin; I will go and see Signora Lucia," said she quietly.

And so it was fixed that the cousins, the Marchese Giovanni Casaloni and the Marchesa Leonora Casaloni, together with Dr. Anastasio Profondi and Signor Sandro Vallardi, should start on their journey together after the mid-day meal.

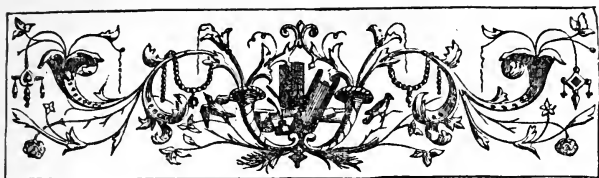
When the time for that came Leonora was absent, and the Gufone went to seek her. He had little

doubt where he should find her. He ran up to the bench on the crag, and found her sitting there, looking out into the hazy mid-day distance while the tears were streaming from her eyes, and chasing each other unheeded down her cheeks.

She got up docilely to follow him, and dried her eyes; but turned suddenly as she was on the point of quitting the spot, and throwing herself on her knees on the ground before the bench, she kissed the rough wood again and again.

"I have a feeling in my heart, cousin," she said, "that I shall never see this place again, and I shall never, never again be so happy as I have been on this bench."

The presentiment, if such it might be called, was correct in its warning in both cases.



## CHAPTER V.

### CONCLUSION.

THE strangely assorted party of fellow-travellers made their journey as projected, leaving Talamone after the mid-day meal, and reaching the little town of Arcidosso, at the foot of Montamiata, on the following afternoon. The moods of mind which prevailed among them were as curiously contrasted as their characters and personalities. The lawyer was brisk, cheerful, and active, mainly anxious to get started in sufficiently good time to preclude the chance of being belated at night. For the Roman citizen had a lively, perhaps an exaggerated idea of the perils of Maremma travelling. Sandro was cross and snappish; in some degree cowed by the consciousness that the vantage ground of the situation was occupied not by himself, but by those who were in the position of

adversaries to him, yet still disposed to play the hectoring part as far as was possible to him under the circumstances. The Gufone was sad and downcast. He was so unlike his usual self as to have no word of retort for the snarling rudenesses which habit, stronger than the sense of his own immediate interest, moved Vallardi from time to time to fling at him. He busied himself assiduously in caring in every possible manner for Leonora's comfort and well-being during the journey. But all was done in a quiet, depressed, undemonstrative manner, which indicated the heaviness of the weight that was oppressing him. The tone of Leonora's mind was in so far different from his, that a strong degree of nervous excitement raised her somewhat out of the dead low level of dull despair. That was the black background of all her thoughts. The consciousness that it was there was never absent from her heart. But she was feverishly strung up by a variety of emotions, and by a sense of the effort needed for the meeting of the events, the scenes and feelings that were before her.

"Now Signora and Signore Marchese," said the lawyer cheerily, when they had housed themselves in the little inn at Arcidosso, "this is what I have



to propose as our line of action, the plan of our campaign, as I may say. Ha, ha, ha! If you, Signore Marchese, and the signorina your cousin will remain here awhile, I will get a *bagarino* and run over to the villa,—it is only two or three miles away,—and open the business to the Marchese Ercole and Signor Cesare. I think that will be the best plan. I will explain that you are here, and will propose that you shall wait upon your relatives at the villa. I think that will be better than taking them by storm, with all our forces in the first instance. Ha, ha, ha! Will you wait for me here till I come back? Signor Vallardi can do as he thinks fit!”

Sandro said that he would go with the lawyer, and it was agreed that the Gufone, alias the Marchese Giovanni Casaloni, and Leonora should remain at the inn till the lawyer should return.

The former seated himself as soon as they were left alone, on one of the little coarse rush-bottomed chairs in the barely furnished inn room, after the fashion of those who have never been accustomed to easy chairs and sofas, placed his two hands on his two knees, let his head drop on his chest, and seemed labouring under the deepest dejection.

Leonora began to walk to and fro across the brick floor of the room, and for awhile there was silence between them.

It was first broken by Leonora.

"You saw and spoke with the Marchesa, you say, Gufone,—who is now my mother ! Tell me what sort of person she is ?"

"She is a very beautiful lady, tall, and dark in hair and eyes, slender, and very graceful. She is your mother, cousin Leonora. She is very like you. She is proud and haughty, and of a high spirit. It was very easy to see that. She was very angry at what I said to her; but now she will see that I spoke the truth, and that I wished to do her service."

"And did you see the Marchese Ercole, my father, Gufone ?" said Leonora, after another pause of silence.

"I did not, cousin Leonora. I never saw him."

And then there was another long silence, the Gufone still sitting dejectedly on his uncomfortable chair, and his cousin continuing to pace the floor excitedly.

"Leonora !" said Nanni at last, suddenly rising from his seat, and confronting her in her walk, "presently, as soon as this lawyer comes back, we

shall have to go—there, where the others are ; and we shall have to say some things that cannot be altered afterwards ! Leonora, are you sure—*sure*—that there is no hope that ever—ever you might come to love me ? ”

A long wailing sigh, that sounded like the moan of one in physical pain, came from the parted lips of the girl, as lifting up to the heavens her tearful eyes, and slowly shaking her head, she said,—

“ I have loved once, my cousin ; and such love as you speak of—such love as that I shall never feel for any other man ! Oh, Nanni ! cousin Nanni ! believe me, my heart is dead ! If only the Virgin would be so good to me as to help me to forget—to take out of my heart the love that grew in it so strong, and filled it all ! If only she would do that for me !—I cannot do it by myself ! ”

“ And if the Virgin were to help you, Leonora, so that you could altogether forget the past, would there be *no* hope !—*no* chance ? ”

“ Nanni ! Nanni ! as true as the blessed saints are in heaven my heart is dead ! Be very sure that I shall never love again ! ” she said, looking him, with sad, tearful eyes, straight in the face.

“ I will say no more, cousin ; and I hope you will

forgive me for saying so much. Now then I know what I have to do."

There was no more said between them. They kept to themselves, each, the painful thoughts that were in either breast, and the hours went on, and still the lawyer did not return. The sun went down, and the short twilight was darkening rapidly into night. And still Nanni remained motionless in the chair he had resumed, and Leonora continued her unceasing walk.

At last they heard the rapid wheels of the *bagarino* below the windows of the room, and in another instant the lawyer entered.

"You must have thought me very long, Signore Marchese and Signora; but there was a great deal to be said—a great deal to be said, documents to be gone into, objections to be met; in short, I have done the best I could; and I believe that all will be found to be smoothed. Of course I had to convince people very unwilling to be convinced; the Signor Cesare especially. I left Signor Vallardi and him together. I don't know what they are talking about or planning, but it does not much matter. They can do nothing. But the Marchese and the Marchesa Elena, you see, were drawn by different

considerations. At first they were as loud against the pretensions and claims it was my duty to put forward, as Signor Cesare was. But when it became clear to them that he had no claim at all—that my young friend, Signor Giovanni, here was the real and only Marchese Casaloni, and head of the family; then, you see, they were glad enough to find that their daughter had not married Signor Cesare. So that upon the whole it is only Signor Cesare that finds himself altogether on the wrong side of the hedge, as one may say. He and his father-in-law, Signor Sandro Vallardi, don't like it at all. And that one can't wonder at. And now, Signora Marchesina, if you will have the kindness to step into the carriage at the door, I shall have the honour and pleasure of presenting you to your parents, and of introducing my client to the members of his family."

All this was rattled off in a brisk and cheery manner indicative of the highest good humour on the part of the speaker, and of a conviction that the matter of his speech was of a kind exceedingly agreeable to his hearers.

"Are you ready, cousin?" said Il Gufone—that is to say the Marchese Casaloni—with the tone and manner of a man ordered to walk to execution.

"Yes, cousin; let us go. I would that this evening were over," responded Leonora.

So Dr. Anastasio Profondi escorted his two young clients to the Villa Casaloni. They were received at the door of entrance by an obsequiously bowing, but evidently very curious, domestic, who ushered the party across the great central hall, in which the front door opened into a small room, looking on to the south terrace facing the gardens. Sundry doors and passages opened on to this central hall, and Nanni's quick eye caught sight of several male and female faces peeping from them as he passed through it. But of the family they had as yet seen no member.

They were not made to wait long, however.

As upon the former occasion in Rome, when Cesare was to make acquaintance for the first time with the Marchese Ercole and the Marchesa Elena Casaloni, the lady this time also put herself forward, or was put forward, to meet the strangers. The Marchesa Elena, stately as we have known her, and dignified, but in her most gracious mood, and with a sweet smile upon her face, walked into the room.

It was the first meeting with her child, since that child, as a baby, had been taken from her arms, and

left her with a void at her heart that had never been filled, and an open wound that had never been cicatrized. There should have been, therefore, on this present occasion of the refinding of her long-lost child, a great rushing into each other's arms, and infinite effusion of emotion. It is, of course, according to all rule that it should have been so. But it was not so! There was something of proud sincerity, that could not stoop to melodramatic acting, in both mother and daughter, that forbade this. Both would have been glad that it should have been so, if, when the moment came, they had found the required amount of emotion in their hearts. But they did not find it there. Nature will have her revenges. She will not submit to being outraged, as such severance of mother and child outrages her, and then permit all to be as it should be when the tardy convenience of the wrong-doers may prompt them to recognise, all too late, her claims. It is a mistake to suppose that the mere knowledge—the mere announcement of the fact that any tie of blood exists between two persons, will avail to produce the affection which should accompany such relationship; and it is an insincerity to represent that it does so.

Neither the Marchesa Elena nor her daughter

were thus insincere ! and the meeting between them was a decorous, but a cold one.

To Nanni the Marchesa bowed graciously, saying, as she did so :—

“ We do not meet for the first time to-day, Signore Marchese. Had you seen good to allow me to become aware to whom I was speaking at our former meeting, I need hardly say that our conversation would have been a different one.”

“ Many other things would have been different also, Signora Marchesa, if it had been in my power to arrange them as I pleased,” said Nanni, gently, and in a very sad voice.

“ Doubtless, doubtless, Signore Marchese. Much trouble and much sorrow has been caused by the acts of those who are no longer here to suffer by them,—or to palliate them. You will not, I trust, have been left unaware that the circumstances of—of your position and your rights have been hitherto as wholly unknown to my husband as they were to yourself.”

“ Quite so, quite so, Signora Marchesa !” put in the lawyer, quickly ; “ the Signore Marchese is perfectly aware that none now living have had the remotest suspicion that any such claimant of the



family title and property was in existence. It would have been unpardonable to leave the Marchese under a false impression on that point."

"It is as the lawyer says, signora!" said Nanni, still with the profound sadness of manner with which he had before spoken; "I have no complaint to make against anybody,—except fate,—and Dr. Profondi here—if he will forgive me for saying so—for finding it all out! It would have been better, I think, to have left me where I was!"

"My dear Signore Marchese!" exclaimed the lawyer in amazement.

"Yes, I know, Signore Dottore! I know. I don't mean to be ungrateful! But you see there is so much sorrow to many people, and—and certainly no happiness for me," said the new Marchese, dropping his voice almost to a whisper as he said the last words.

"I am grieved to hear you speak so, Signore Marchese!" said the Lady Elena. "I had hoped—Here is my husband! It will be for me to introduce you to your uncle, Signore Marchese, as an old acquaintance!" she added, with a pale and rather wan smile, as the Marchese Ercole entered the room.

The ex-Monsignore seemed inclined in a pompous sort of way to get up the scene of meeting with his long-lost daughter and the nephew, who came to thrust him from his seat, with some little melodramatic propriety of emotion, but on finding not the smallest disposition to second him on the part of any of the assembled party, he relapsed at once into commonplace, and a few proper observations respecting the inscrutableness of the ways of Providence, with a considerable feeling of relief.

“It becomes us all,” he said, “and perhaps I may say, it more especially becomes and behoves me to submit myself with unquestioning reverence to the will of heaven. But it certainly is a very inscrutable dispensation, and perhaps I may say, with all humility, a singularly trying one, that this discovery should not have been made before I had taken the step of quitting the ecclesiastical career.”—The Lady Elena, at this point of her husband’s speech, turned away to the large recessed window, which looked out upon the gardens, drawing her daughter with her, to separate colloquy there.—“The Casaloni,” continued the Marchese, “have had eleven cardinals, Signore Marchese!—you will find all the portraits of them in the great saloon,

up-stairs !—and I suppose—I suppose,” he added, with a sigh and an upward glance of pious resignation directed towards the rafters above his head, “that Providence, in its wisdom, did not see fit to let us reach the dozen !”

“Shall we not see our cousin, Signor Cesare ?” said Nanni to the Marchese.

Leonora darted a quick and startled glance towards the group, consisting of the Marchese Ercole, Nanni, and the lawyer, from the further end of the room, where she was standing in the window with her mother. She turned pale, and a little tremor passed over her ; and then the pallor gave place to a hot flush, as she felt, rather than saw, that her mother’s eye was marking these outward and visible signs of the hidden secret of her heart.

“He waits but to be summoned to our conference !” said the Marchese Ercole ; “he thought it better to wait till we had spoken. His position is an unfortunate one. Signor Dottore, if you will ring the bell, we will send for him !”

Thus called, Signor Cesare in a few minutes made his appearance. His position at that moment was indeed a more unfortunate one than any of those present, except Leonora and Nanni, were aware of.

It was evident enough, however, that he felt himself the full extent of the misery his faithlessness, his cowardice, and his worldliness had prepared for him.

One rapid glance as he entered the room showed him the relative positions of the persons in it. There was a small measure of relief in finding that Leonora was standing apart, and that it was possible for him to address the others without immediately facing her. He came forward towards the three men, very pale and crestfallen. He would have given much that the "Gufone" had not been there.

"Signor Cesare," said the Marchese, "I believe you have not now to make acquaintance with the Marchese, the discovery of whose birth has made—unavoidably—so great a change in your prospects and position. I have the certainty that the Marchese feels as I do,—as we must all feel—the hardship of the case as it affects you."

Cesare bowed in silence.

"Yes!" replied Nanni, nodding his head towards Cesare, "Signor Cesare and I know each other."

"We have known each other under very different circumstances," rejoined Cesare;—"under circumstances so different as to change every relation-

ship between us. I do not doubt that the Signor Marchese Casaloni will feel how much and how many allowances that change calls for ! ”

While the above short dialogue had been taking place Leonora had betrayed her secret to the sharp and experienced eye of the mother. She had been trembling and changing colour ! She had quivered at the first sound of his voice, as if smitten by a sudden palsy stroke. The Lady Elena's eyes were opened. The meaning of the warnings her strange visitor in the garden had urged upon her, flashed upon her mind with the suddenness of lightning. And a pang of bitter regret for the proud confidence which had prompted her to pay no attention to them wrung her heart. For Leonora had been saying words to her mother, while they had been standing together in the recess of the window, which had forced upon her mind the conviction that she had at last recovered her daughter only to lose her again for ever. And she thought that if that fatal marriage between Cesare and the daughter of the Maremma outlaw had never taken place, all this might have been otherwise. Now she saw that it could not, for the resolution which her newly-found daughter had been communicating to her, was

one which she felt in her heart would not be changed.

"It cannot be denied," said the Marchese Ercole in reply to the last words of Cesare, "that the position is an unfortunate one; and my nephew the Marchese——"

"*Colendissimo* Signor Zio," said Nanni, interrupting him, "my most respected uncle, I have thought of all this—and of some other things—and I have made up my mind to a determination, which will, I think, save much trouble. Signora Marchesa, cousin Leonora, will you kindly let me speak to you too, at the same time?"

The Marchesa Elena thus appealed to, came forward to the middle of the room where the group of men were standing, and Leonora followed her, with her eyes persistently fixed on the floor.

Nanni gave her one long and earnest look, and, for a second, her eyes met his before he spoke again.

"Signore Marchese, my respected uncle," he began again, "I will tell you how I mean to try and mend the trouble that has fallen on many of us. When I was born, I was thrust out of the way because I was not wanted in the world. When I

am found again, it is to make trouble to everybody. We Casaloni will make ourselves quits with the Church. She lost one of the family in you, she shall gain one in me. I don't mean to say that——" here his voice trembled a little, and he stole a look at Leonora, whose eyes remained obstinately glued to the ground. "I do not say," he went on, recovering himself, "that I should have acted in this way, if—if other matters had not made me see that a cloister is the fittest place in this world for me. As it is, I shall find one to hide in. Let Signor Cesare retain the position to which he was invited by the family. He is in every way fitter for it than I. Let him be the heir to the family honours, and the continuer of its grandeur. There is a place, I know, on the Apennine, above Gubbio—Avellino, they call it—a Camaldolese monastery, Signor Zio. I will go and end my days there."

"Nanni," said Leonora, putting out her hand to take his, and looking wistfully into his face, while carefully turning her shoulder towards Cesare, "I would that it were not necessary that we two should part for ever. I would—I would—that it were not. But it is better so. I have already been

telling my lady-mother that I have come to the same resolution that you have. *Il mio signore padre* will seek for me some house of good nuns, who will take me among them. I am tired, very tired, of the world !”

There was much and long discussion, and sundry attempts on the part of the Marchese Ercole and his wife to change the determination of the two newly-found members of the family. But it was in vain.

The coarsely-expressed exultation of Sandro Valardi, the efforts of Cesare to conceal his exultation, the astonishment of Dr. Profondi, the disappointment of the Marchese and of the Lady Elena must be pictured by my readers for themselves.

Nanni and Leonora were both unshakable in their resolution. Leonora took the veil in a house of Benedictine nuns among the hills which border and look down on the Roman Campagna, on the eastern side. But she did not live long.

Nanni, on the contrary, lived to old age amid the snows and storms of the mountain-home he had chosen. It is the same convent of Camaldolese monks which is memorable as having afforded hospitality to Dante. And if that circumstance



had not acted as an incentive to induce the present writer to visit it, the foregoing excerpt from the chronicles of a great Roman family would probably never have been presented to an English reader.

THE END.









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